

# TORRIDGE METHODIST CIRCUIT

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

### May 2025 - Issue 156

Welcome to Edition Number 156

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As well as the Circuit Facebook page – **Torridge Methodist Circuit**, we have a private Facebook Group where we care share thoughts, prayers & other material on **Torridge Methodist Circuit Group**. If you wish to join please push the Join button & I can add you.

Please pray for our Ministers, Rob Blackhall & Andrew Vidamour, for Frank Watson & Sarah Richards and all involved in the varied life of the Circuit; for those connected to the various Chapels & the communities in which they live & work.

#### **CIRCUIT ZOOM SERVICES**

The Circuit Services continue to take place ON VARIOUS Sunday's on Zoom using the Services that are often printed in the Circuit Newsletter. The Services are on Sunday Evenings starting at 6.30pm – but the 'doors will be open' at about 6.15pm. The contact/entry details will be send out during the preceding week & the Service can be accessed via a computer/laptop with camera/microphone, I Pad/Phone or using a 'normal' phone. Even if you have a device with camera/microphone & do not wish to be seen – you can join in without the camera on.

If you do not receive an email or want further information – please contact Sarah Richards, Circuit Administrator on 01237 472649 or [sarahrichards185@gmail.com](mailto:sarahrichards185@gmail.com)

The **May Zoom Service** is on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May at 6.30pm led by Elsie Potter. This will be the Annual Easter Offering Service

## FROM REV ROB BLACKHALL – SUPERINTENDENT MINISTER

Dear friends

A few people have asked what advice I would give to the circuit as I take my leave. Part of my response to that is to say that we discover that together under God in our conversations together and in our Church Councils.

The Church generally says

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

That is about both the inner life of the Christian and the Church as well as how we share the love of God beyond the four walls of the Church. That latter point has to be primary, and urgent. The Church exists not for itself but for others. I have said frequently – How can we be the Church of Jesus Christ in North Devon in the 21st century? The world is changing so rapidly – I hope we are not left behind.

So, if pushed, my first answer would be mission and service.

Secondly, I would dare to comment on Ministry and the use of the gifts of the Ministry team (Andrew, Frank and Debbie going forward).

One of my favourite TV programmes is “The West Wing” set in the fictitious White House during the Presidency of one Josiah Bartlet. He is surrounded by an incredible team of bright, passionate and sensitive staff, who so clearly care. Now, in one particular episode they were experiencing a series of difficulties and getting bogged down with the minutiae of running the country. They were not getting their message over; indeed, they were holding back from their strengths. The conclusion was, “Let Bartlet, be Bartlet”. Play to the strengths of the President and his incredibly team.

Let you Ministers (Presbyter, Deacon, or Lay) be Ministers. Allow their strengths to be used for the good of all.

I will give you an example. I came to Torrington with twenty years' experience of being a School Chaplain and holding a senior position in the organization. That has not been used for the good of either Church nor community. My interaction with schools has been, sadly minimal. That is partly my fault, but also, the ridiculous work load, often having to do too many things just to keep the show on the road. Some of the most productive times for me was as Mayor's Chaplain in Torrington. That opened up a whole avenue of interaction with the community and the councilors. The Methodist Church was more visible.

Allow our ministers to be ministers, to build the Church; not to be administrators.

And thirdly, Stewardship. We have got to get the governance of our Chapels right. I still find it hard to think that none of our Chapels held an Asbestos certificate. That should have been done over twenty years ago. The safety of our buildings, electrical, health and Safety and annual checks cannot be an optional extra. We seek to make our premises a SAFER SPACE, so Safeguarding cannot be ignored, nor its training, as Safeguarding is the responsibility of us all. We need to look after our property and our money properly and to be able to account for it. This responsibility has to be taken within the Chapels. The same applies to GDPR. I know it seems an unnecessary burden, but it has to be done to protect people.

Fourthly, to practice what we preach. That means working together in Christian love; exhibiting those fruits of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and beyond. I sometimes wish that we were a bit kinder to one another.

But, as I started, these things are for conversation under God. I will shortly take my leave; but these things remain. We need to share the Love of God, practice Kingdom values. We need to be the Church in the community, not by telling the community what they need, but by listening very carefully.

Every blessing - Rob

## **QUIZ**

There are names of sixteen (16) books of the Bible hidden in the paragraph below.

Lets see how many you can find.

HAVE FUN!

I once made a remark about the hidden books of the Bible. A certain fluke, kept people looking so hard for facts, and for others, it was a revelation. Some were in a jam, especially since the names of the books were not capitalized. But the truth finally struck home to numbers of our readers. To others it was a job. We want it to be a most fascinating little moment for you. Yes, there will be some really easy ones to spot. Others may require judges to help find them. I will quickly admit it usually takes the preacher to find one of them, and there will be loud lamentations when it is found. A little lady says she brews a cup of tea so she can concentrate better. See how you will compete. Relax now, for there really are sixteen books of the Bible in this paragraph.

HAPPY HUNTING

Rob

## **The Death of Pope Francis**

Our thoughts and prayers are with our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers following the death of Pope Francis.

### **A Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you that you continue to call disciples to represent you on earth.

We recognise this call in the life, faith and ministry of Pope Francis.

We give thanks for the unique gifts with which you blessed him for this task, and for his obedience in fulfilling all that you asked of him.

Thank you for receiving Francis into the eternal home that you have been preparing for him.

We pray that all who mourn his loss will be comforted and for the Conclave that will elect his successor.

We hold before you the Roman Catholic Church and pray that we might continue to work together for the unity of your Church and for peace, justice and compassion in your world.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**For further Methodist response please go to [A statement on the death of His Holiness Pope Francis - The Methodist Church](#)**

God Bless - Rob

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

During our discussion on Marriage and Relationships those of us who meet to wrestle with some difficult material were aware that there are things that we as Christians disagree. We came to the conclusion that while that might be so, and while that we were one in Christ; that we should be thinking about some of the major issues of our day; and about our faith. Hence, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

These will take place one a month from 10-12 in various locations. It will be an opportunity to discuss and meet together. What might the Bible teach us? How has the Christian Church looked at a particular question over the years? Where does our God given reason lead us? Have we any experience that adds light in given area?

## **DISCUSSION MORNINGS - WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

There are things we don't always agree on, but should think about, from 10-12am

Tues 13th May      Buckland Brewer

Wed 11th June      Torrington

## **FROM REVD ANDREW VIDAMOUR**

Dear friends,

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> May will mark the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Guernsey, in the Channel Islands, from German Occupation during the Second World War. This will be the first larger celebration of Liberation Day there for ten years, as the 75th Anniversary was severely curtailed by the Covid pandemic.

Sadly, this will probably be the last major commemoration where a fair number of people will be alive who remember that time, whether they were evacuated or remained in Guernsey during the War, for the almost five years of the Occupation.

Both my grandfathers, and a number of other members of my family were in the island during this time, while my grandmothers, and my parents and their siblings, were all evacuated, spending most of their time at various places in the North of England.

In the film of the book 'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society', by Mary Ann Shaffer, there is a moving scene where the evacuation of some of the islanders is shown, although this was filmed, rather incongruously, at Clovelly! This still remains a powerful moment in the story, however, and one I find personally significant.

All this, I think, may remind us of some of the great and recurring Biblical themes: exile and return; liberation from captivity in its many forms; the importance of place and roots in a sense of personal (and spiritual) belonging; and the value of being part of a group and a culture, to one's sense of identity.

In turn, these are all major human and literary themes in general, as well, but I want to draw your attention to the liberating power and significance of the Easter stories and reality.

You may wish to take one of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus and ponder how this brings new freedom and hope to the witnesses of it: Thomas, for example, freed from a burden of self-doubt as he proclaims Jesus as 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20: 19-29).

And as we seek to enter into the experiences, thoughts and feelings of those involved in the Easter stories, we may find other examples of the liberation brought by the Holy Spirit, out of great sadness, oppression and despair.

I like to think, too, that Liberation Day in Guernsey, year by year, is, in a sense, echoing that same Easter joy and celebration.

With Easter blessings.  
Andrew Vidamour

### **BURIED TREASURE**

If you have any buried treasure in the form of archive documents (minute books, account books, property papers, correspondence, baptism registers etc), Dave Watson or I would be pleased to receive it as we make deposits of historic material at the North Devon Record Office from time to time, and other material can be retained locally.

In particular, we would be pleased to have any photographs of the interior of Bridge Street Methodist Church, Bideford (which can be copied and returned if necessary).

Thank you for your help in this – it is important to be good stewards of past records as part of our Christian calling.

With every blessing - Andrew Vidamour

### **FROM FRANK WATSON – CIRCUIT LAY MINISTER**

A reminder that **Mid Week Morning Prayer** takes place **every Wednesday morning** at **9.30am** at **Torrington Methodist Church**. At this short time of prayer (around 20 minutes) we use the liturgy of Prayer in the Morning from The Methodist Worship Book, supported by additional material, mainly, The Methodist Prayer Handbook. There is of course opportunity within our time together for you to bring your own prayers. Tea or Coffee is served afterwards which you are very welcome to stay for should you wish.



I just want to say a very big **THANK YOU!!!** To everyone who helped to organise and make Farm Plam Sunday a great success again this year. Thank you also to everyone who came because without your support to would not of been what it was.





## The Mission to Seafarers

Caring for seafarers around the world

**Another Thank You** to all our knitters around the circuit still providing items for The Mission to Seafarers. For your information, just before Easter, I sent away another 39 Woollen Hat's, 6 Mufflers, 1 Balaclava, and, 4 pairs of Fingerless Mittens. The box in my office is filling up for the next shipment already!

### TORRINGTON METHODIST CHAPEL

Torrington Methodist Church welcome all to their **Coffee Mornings where delicious Bacon Butties are served and where cakes and bric-a-brac are sold.** The next Coffee Morning is on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May from 10am till 12noon. Proceeds for the Church Shelter Box Gaza Appeal

#### **Warm Welcome**

Come and enjoy a **Warm Welcome** at Torrington Methodist Church. Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May, noon to 2.00pm, straight after our coffee morning.

Free - entry, drink, food, activities

Have soup & sandwich, possibility of cake! 😊

Time to chat, or play board games, or enjoy a craft activity.

Under 18s need to be accompanied by an adult.

*This is part of The Methodist Church initiative offering A Warm Welcome to everyone, nationwide.*

#### **Cream Tea & Garden Walks at The Downes on Sunday 25 May**

Come along & enjoy the lovely views, a delicious tea & a good chat!

Parking & toilets available on site.

Funds raised for Torrington Methodist Church

Event will be Sunday afternoon, exact times to be confirmed.

Entrance to The Downes, EX39 5LB is on the A386 between Landcross & Great Torrington

### BUCKLAND BREWER

We continue to Live Stream Services on the Buckland Brewer Methodist Church You-Tube Channel on the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the Month & the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday if there is one.

The Weekly '**Time Together' Toddler Group** runs on Mondays, during Term Time at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church**. We meet from 9.30am to about 12noon, The cost is £1.50 per family—so if anyone is aware of any Babies & Toddlers, who with their parents, grandparents or carers are looking for a 'chilled out' session of play & chat with tea/coffee/biscuits – just point them in the direction of Buckland Chapel – Dave Watson 07484 223515 or [bucklanddave1953@btinternet.com](mailto:bucklanddave1953@btinternet.com)

The **Wednesday Weekly Coffee Morning** also continues at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church** from 10am-12noon – this is for **ALL** but especially for those who have moved into the

parish/village since lockdown or anyone who would like to meet others in the community over a mug of tea/coffee with Biscuits & possibly Cake!!

The **Monthly 'Mini Market'**, raising funds for Community Groups in Buckland take place at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church**. – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits will be available for Chapel Funds. The next Market is on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May from 10am to 1pm.

**Plant Sale on Village Green on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May from 10am to 3pm** – flowers & vegetables on sale – Proceeds for Fete Funds which will be used to support the Parish & Methodist Churches; the Hall & Churchyard.

**Safari Lunch on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May** – Tickets to be booked by contacting Betty on 01237 451132 – Adults £15; Primary School children £10 & Under 5's are free. Sittings at 12.15 & 1pm starting at the Hall, where Soup & the Main Course are served – Deserts in Methodist Church & Tea/Coffee in Parish Church. Funds again for Fete Funds.

The **Community Choir**, based in the Chapel has returned to practice on various Mondays at 7.30pm.

### **VE 80<sup>th</sup> Celebrations in Buckland**

Exhibition by Buckland History Group on World War 2 in Parish Church, throughout May. On Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May there will be additional items with members of the History Group Committee present. The Church is open from 9am to 6.30pm with refreshments available in Schoolroom.

**Family Fun Day on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May at the Buckland Playing Field from 2pm till 6pm.** Activities & Food – proceeds for Royal British Legion & Playing Field Funds.

If any Chapel would like me to bring some historical bits to display during a Coffee Morning or such like with specific items to that Chapel, please contact Dave Watson, in plenty of time.

### **BIDEFORD NEWS**

**MONTHLY COFFEE MORNING** – This takes place from 10am-12noon on the last Saturday of the month. This is a Free event but donations are gratefully received for local charities. The next one is on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May.

**JIGSAW PUZZLE AFTERNOON** – This takes place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> May from 2-4pm. We will be making jigsaws together, with a break for tea/coffee and biscuits.

### **EVENTS AT ALVERDISCOTT METHODIST CHAPEL**

#### **Coffee Morning**

These take place on the first Thursday in the month from 10am

## **Garden Club**

The meeting in March was enjoyed by all. The next meeting will be on Monday 26 May, yes I know it's a bank holiday, when we will visit the home of Linda and Fray Southgate, at Horwood Farm. Please gather at the Chapel at 2.15pm so we can carshare.

The cost is just £1.00. *For the latest information contact Philip Squire on 01237 473692.*

## **LANGTREE METHODIST CHURCH**

Our Bible Study continues weekly on Thursday evenings at 7.30pm. We are continuing our study of Genesis using a series of three books by Warren Wiersbe. There is always plenty of interesting discussion so please come along if you can.

We meet on Thursday evenings at 7.30pm in Langtree Sunday School, aiming to finish at about 9pm.

Blessings - Cathy

## **NORTHAM METHODIST CHURCH**

### **An Invitation to Northam and Bideford's Bible Study**

This group is open to all: If YOU would like to join us you would be VERY WELCOME, even if you can only come now and then. We are very much a discussion group where we all learn from each other.

We meet on Tuesday Afternoons at 2pm at the home of Diana Yendall & led by Julia Spencer  
Contact 01237 477836 or 01237 425361 – Lynne Burgon will also be involved in the leading of the sessions.

We are studying **Women of the Old Testament - 12 Studies by Gladys Hunt**

### **LENT COURSE after Easter Break**

May 6th	Esther: Captive in a strange Land	Esther 2 and 4
May 13th	Esther: Courage to act	Esther 5: 1-8 and chapters 7 and 8
May 20th	The Model Wife: A Portrait of Excellence	Proverbs 31: 10-31
May 27th	Abigail: A level headed Woman	1 Samuel 25: 2-44

### **Bible Month at Northam: The Gospel of John at 2pm**

Northam 8<sup>th</sup> July: Julia Spencer

15<sup>th</sup> July: Linda Davis

22<sup>nd</sup> July: Andrew Vidamour

29<sup>th</sup> July: Dave Watson

All Welcome because we all learn from each other

## **NORTHAM THURSDAY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME**

Starts at 2.15pm - £2 including Speaker, Draw & refreshments

May 1 – Outing

May 15 – Jenny's Cream Tea.



## **MILTON DAMEREL METHODIST CHURCH**

**Ecumenical Bible Study Group** - Our Bible Study in conjunction with Thornbury/Bradford Anglicans has now re-started We have moved to a monthly session – the next one is on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am in the Schoolroom. We will be delighted if anyone wants to join us – for any of our sessions.

Please contact David & Janet Fisher (Tel: 07858506973) or Grace Millman (Tel: 01409261251) for further details.

**IN MEMORIAM** - Hope Chapel aka Black Torrington Methodist Church 1843 to 2023  
Prepared by Maureen and Peter Ellis, members for 45 years.

We arrived in Black Torrington in 1978 and found a Methodist Chapel which became our Spiritual home. Brian Down proudly told us that father had built it, and there was a photo on a wall in the Schoolroom that showed the crowd at the opening ceremony. There was also a plaque on the wall inside the Chapel commemorating the life of a couple who died in the 1930's who had obviously merited recognition, but there was no hint what it might be. There was also talk of an earlier chapel which was indicated on the Tythe map held at St Mary's as being in Back Lane. It took many years to unravel the mystery far enough to discover stories of the disciples of Jesus who worshipped and served their Lord in this place, and influenced our Christian journey.

I now know that early "formation meetings" for Hope Chapel in Black Torrington were held in a cottage in Back Lane (owned at the time by a Joseph Chapman) part of Venn Farm, and now one of Ernie Luxton's sheds! I gleaned this information from an article in BT Times written by Ralph Chapman, a descendent of Joseph Chapman, who was perhaps best known for owning two breweries in the area. (Joseph Chapman was also a benefactor of other Chapels in the next village, Sheepwash.)

One recently discovered photograph of the original chapel building in Broad Street, looks very similar to the present building but a little smaller. The Sunday School children are lined up against an outside wall on the narrow strip of pavement which still exists. There would have been no cars to worry about, only horses and carts. However, it would not have been as peaceful as you might imagine. Brian Down told me the noise of horses' hoofs on the stony road was "quite considerable".

It is the present Methodist Chapel building, opened in May 1921, that was built by Brian Down's father, Marshall Down, on the site of the earlier HOPE Bible Christian (BC) Chapel (1843). A newspaper article at the time of the opening of the replacement chapel gives further information on the original chapel.

Original plans for rebuilding were put on hold with the outbreak of the first world war, and more modest plans started, mainly to include a new roof. Work commenced, but on removing the roof

the walls were found to be unsafe, and they had to be rebuilt from the foundations. The estimated costs nearly doubled from £800 to £1,400.

To raise the funds for this building the members worked “exceedingly hard” at a time when everyone was recovering from the hardships and losses of war. Whilst building was in progress, the Services were held in a marquee. And later, in a barn in the village. The report in the North Devon Journal noted, “curiously under these conditions the congregations have doubled and even trebled in size”.

The photograph in 1921 records the large gathering outside the building for the opening of the United Methodist Church. The Chapel was declared open by a Mrs Down from Barnstaple who compared the enthusiasm of the present members to the spirit of those of that neighbourhood of many, many years ago “who worshipped without a church”, in Back Lane.

Some original Bible Christian chapel buildings did not survive as, being in a rural area, they were thrown up quickly in the style farmers used to urgently provide for their animals. On the other hand, when a congregation grew, or there was need for a schoolroom for the children, the building could easily be adapted or extended. This is illustrated very well at Black Torrington. A stone, rescued and embedded in the south-facing wall of the current Methodist chapel, records: Hope B.C. Chapel, Built 1843, Enlarged 1865, Restored 1885!

Bible Christianity started in 1815, so 1865 would have been a Jubilee year and time to celebrate by adding a schoolroom. Maybe it was the other way round, the one room chapel, which became a schoolroom, was added to and joined to the adjacent house! The stone, seen in the recently found photo of the original Hope Chapel, was hanging on the road-side wall, and could well have been carved and included at the time the enlargement was made, where it would be proudly displayed to passers-by!

After neglect during the first world war, when no building materials would have been available, a restoration project turned into a complete rebuild on almost the same, but slightly larger footprint. A few graves were disturbed at that time, and their headstones now rest against the building. So eventually, I am writing a book on the Life (and End) of Hope Chapel to do justice to its complete history, and to the whole Bible Christian Era (1815 to 1907) which influenced the first one hundred years of its existence.

Barely one hundred years. Yet Bible Christians impacted not only this deeply rural area of Devon and Cornwall, but other similar areas in this country and across the world in America, Australia and even China in those years.

Hope Chapel was just one of about 100 chapels built in villages and hamlets across the South West in those years, concentrated mainly within a 20 to 30 mile radius of Shebbear, bringing into being the Shebbear Circuit. Hope Chapel flourished as a Methodist Church for nearly a further 100 years, until 2020 when Covid struck! As part of the Shebbear Circuit, in two guises, and then part of the larger Torridge Circuit, Hope Chapel, in two guises, faithfully served the Lord and the

community of Black Torrington. Quite a history! But what story can explain the fervour and energy roused in so many people when hearing it for the first time in this remote area? Only the two thousand year history of Christianity!

Do we know the names of the heroes or giants of the faith we are indebted to for bringing the good news of Christianity to Cornwall and Devon in the first place? And was it that way round? How far back can we go? (In other parts of the British Isles we would have a different story to tell!)

It was always known there were some early Christian saints in Cornwall when it was on the edge of the Roman Empire, but it is only recently that evidence has been unveiled, on a website, to indicate the scale of this. So we now know there were more than three hundred Celtic Saints in Cornwall, by the third and fourth centuries A.D.! And there were a few others in our adjoining deeply rural area of Devon too! The Tamar is so close to its source here that you can jump across it quite easily, or sparks of revival fire from Cornwall could easily fly across it, then and now!

A well-known, major revival in England in the 18th century was brought about by the brothers, John and Charles Wesley, and their mother Susanna! John Wesley was ordained an Anglican Minister and remained so until he died, but he was not allowed to preach in Anglican pulpits as his preaching was considered too fiery and revolutionary at the time. So he preached outside in the open air, and travelled the length and breadth of the country on horseback to do it, reaching Cornwall many times. Charles Wesley was responsible for thousands of hymns, making the Biblical stories accessible and memorable.

William Bryant (aka William O'Bryan) born in Luxulyan was about 10 years old when Wesley preached at Gwennap Pit near Luxulyan for the last time. Seven years later William became a Wesleyan local preacher. 15 years later he tried to become a Wesleyan Methodist Minister but was turned down twice for being too fiery! He became an independent preacher travelling the lanes including over the border in Devon. He was heard twice on one farm and then invited to Lake farmhouse, Shebbear. There were so many strong Christians there already that they formed a Society.

At that time the curate in St Michael's Anglican church was a good preacher, but when he was removed and replaced by someone who didn't mention the gospel at all, this Society at Lake became connected to other independent new societies, started by O'Bryan, and became the Shebbear Bible Christian Circuit. Eventually to become the Shebbear Methodist Circuit when, in 1907 Bible Christians lost their separate identity and became part of the new United Methodist Church.

The Bible Christians left several innovations as a lasting legacy. The ministry of women, calling then 'Female Special Agents', was one! Two members of Hope Chapel, James and Elizabeth Vanstone, commemorated on a plaque, gave the first £10 to the Bible Christian China Inland Mission, whose missionary work is still bearing fruit in China today. And not only in China, the underground House Church movement birthed there is pushing its way across the unreached lands until they complete the Great Commission around the globe - "Back to Jerusalem"! Back to the Jews!

By the time Shebbear Methodist Circuit became part of the Torrridge Methodist Circuit in 2011, the name, Hope Chapel, had been reclaimed by us! Hope Chapel, and the Shebbear Circuit, during the last 10 years of the Circuit's existence, saw many innovations that gave hope to many in the community within and beyond the chapel, and the Circuit.

In Black Torrington in the 19th century, the first protestant chapel was built, but not Methodist, and well into the 19th century there were still no nearby Methodist churches or chapels. There was of course an Anglican Church, St Mary's, that would have been originally a Catholic Church. (The church was here in Norman times, 1066 and all that, but the earliest record of a rector is in March 1278.)

It was 300 years ago that Methodism first made an impact in Cornwall, but it seems there was something about the small village of Shebbear and the deeply rural area around it, that caused Shebbear, 100 years later, to need its own movement of the Holy Spirit, Bible Christianity, to bring about revival! And the spark again came from Cornwall!

Peter and I are blessed to be members of a growing gathering of Christians in Black Torrington, from all backgrounds, who are welcome to worship at St Mary's Church and to serve on the new Church Council (Church Team). The legal powers and authority of the old Parochial Church Council have recently been vested in the newly named Holywell Benefice. It is the local group of Anglican churches on which all the Church Councils are represented. It is significant that the group is named Holywells - the many Holy Wells in the area link us to our common Christian Celtic past!

Coming from the Chapel, which prophetically reclaimed the name Hope, not so long ago, and seeing that prophesy fulfilled, we pray that the symbols of Hope Chapel at St Mary's will not only be a lasting memorial, but remind us all of the hope that is in us.

When we are One, we are the Body of Christ, and we,  
The Church, will keep on rising from the dead!

## **FOCUSING MINISTRY – WISDOM FROM METHODIST HISTORY**

by Will Fletcher.

Our son is 8 months old. He is a superb disrupter of rhythms of life. We are thinking about what ministry looks like alongside this changed family life. I recently received wisdom from a friend that being a father and a husband are vocations every bit as important as being a minister. Honouring that calling, I have sought to create space each day for us as a family to read the Bible and pray together. It ties in nicely with reflections I've been having about ministry, especially in an age of acute pressure put on ministers due to smaller and older congregations, and increased bureaucracy in society.

I recently read the 'Liverpool Minutes' of 1820 that appear in [Volume 1 of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of The Methodist Church](#). Apologies to any of my college tutors who may have gone through this with us, but I don't recall reading them before. What has been particularly

interesting is discovering that they came from the Conference when the Wesleyan Methodists were digesting statistics showing the first fall in membership. They give a glimpse of how our ancestors sought to address this issue.

I should begin by saying that there is much that is different in the contexts – in church and society – so this isn't a plea to return to some supposed glory day. These are also only initial thoughts having read through the Minutes and not a formulated plan!

Its first point is for ministers to 'be more than ever attentive to personal religion, and to the Christian instruction and government of our families.' We don't have to accept the idea of the (male) minister having government over their families to recognise the first response to declining membership isn't on strategies or increased workload, but being focused on the spiritual wellbeing of the minister, and, where applicable, for them to be enabled to model what a Christian family life may look like by caring for and worshipping with their families.

The next area of focus is on worship. Ministers were encouraged to spend more time in their study reading and praying seeking that 'anointing for our office' which 'would yield what most of all we ourselves need and desire: a large increase of ardent piety and of vigorous faith; holy importunity in prayer, and irresistible persuasiveness in preaching.'

Whilst we would rightly want to add in creativity and interactivity to our leading of worship, these Minutes encourage us not to lose sight of our core message, which should be delivered with 'plainness of speech' that there is the possibility of a present experience of the forgiving love of God, and a call to respond by living lives of holiness.

The final big section of these Minutes urged ministers not to forget their call to be 'under-shepherds of the flock of God – Jesus Christ Himself being the "Chief Shepherd".' There is encouragement to focus on supporting the Pastoral Visitors in their ministry. Also to regularly hear from them about who the people are who needed a visit from the minister – not so that they felt that 'the Church' had visited them, but that would build them up or reconnect them with the fellowship.

The focus of pastoral ministry should be on those on the edges, those who have stopped coming, teenagers and young adults, and meeting regularly with those who are working with children. Ministers were exhorted not to forget the villages where they didn't live, but where there were members who had pastoral needs. How easy it can become for ministers to focus only on the large church, or the community where the manse is. This is ministry that isn't necessarily about big numbers or 'success' but the faithful journeying alongside people.

This pastoral mindset is not just for visiting. When leading business meetings 'we are under an obligation to act on such occasions, not merely as the Chairmen [sic.] of Public Meetings, but also as the Pastors of Christian Societies.' Sometimes it can be the members of the meeting who would rather we were limited to only being the Chair of the meeting, but I wonder how we might chair them differently with that mindset.

I don't want this to add to anyone else's burdensome to-do list. Instead, as someone in their 11<sup>th</sup> year in ministry who isn't despondent about the tasks of ministry, but often frustrated about the lack of time for carrying out the work for which I believe I have been called and formed, these Minutes have given me a boost, but also left the question – Is it possible in the Methodist Church today for ministers to fulfil this calling?

Will is a Methodist presbyter in the Central Sussex United Area. This is his first appointment having been in the final cohort to train at Wesley House, Cambridge. As part of his training he spent a year studying at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

Away from ministry Will plays for the Patcham Silver Band. He also follows the fortunes of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club which has been less painful recently than for most of his life!

The **Theology Everywhere** website is made available by the Methodist Church as one of the actions being taken to create a learning church. Contributors are from varied backgrounds; many but not all are Methodist. The views expressed are the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the position of the Methodist Church.

The moderator of Theology Everywhere is Rev'd Dr George Bailey. Enquiries should be addressed to him at [george.bailey@methodist.org.uk](mailto:george.bailey@methodist.org.uk)

### **The following is the Plan/Lectionary for May**

HC= Holy Communion	PC= At Parish Church
MC= Methodist Church	C& F= Coffee and Fellowship
Café= Café Worship	SB=Sunday Breakfast
T = Transport	LUAL – Light Up A Light
CA – Church Anniversary	

### **Post codes of Chapels**

Alverdiscott – EX31 3PT	Bideford (High Street) – EX39 2AN
Buckland Brewer – EX39 5LP	Langtree – EX38 8NF
Littleham – EX39 5HW	Milton Damerel – EX22 7DJ
Northam – EX39 1BS	Parkham – EX39 5PG
Shebbear – EX21 5SJ	Torrington – EX38 8AL

### **LECTIONARY for May**

**Easter 3 Year C – Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14**  
**Easter 4 Year C – Acts 9: 36-41; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17**  
**Easter 5 Year C – Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; John 13:31-35**  
**Or (Aldersgate Sunday) Isaiah 12:1-6 or Isaiah 51:1-3,7-11; Psalm 130; Romans 5:1-11**  
**or 2 Peter 1:1-11; Mark 12:28-37 or Luke 10:1-12, 17-20**  
**Easter 6 Year C – Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10,22 – 22:5; John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9**  
**Ascension Day Year C – Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53**

	<b>May 4</b>	<b>May 11</b>	<b>May 18</b>	<b>May 25</b>
	<b>Easter 3</b>	<b>Easter 4</b>	<b>Easter 5</b>	<b>Easter 6</b>
<b>At Home Worship</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Potter Zoom 6.30pm Easter Offering Service</b>	<b>Buckland Live Stream 10am</b>	<b>Buckland Live Stream 10am</b>
<b>Bideford 10.30am</b>	<b>Withall</b>	<b>Blackhall</b>	<b>Vidamour HC</b>	<b>Price</b>
<b>Northam 10.30am</b>	<b>Hall-Tomkin</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>Davis  Fellowship 4pm</b>	<b>Potter HC</b>
		<b>SHEBBEAR</b>	<b>METHODIST</b>	<b>CHURCH</b>
<b>Black Torrington Friday 3pm</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Vidamour on 9<sup>th</sup> May</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Langtree 11am</b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>@Parish Church</b>	<b>F Watson</b>	<b>@Lake</b>
<b>Milton Damerel 11am</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Withall</b>	<b>Cafe</b>	<b>@Lake</b>
<b>Shebbear 10.30am</b>	<b>Booth</b>	<b>C&amp;F</b>	<b>United @Parish Church</b>	<b>Blackhall HC United</b>
<b>Sheepwash 11am</b>	<b>D Watson</b>	<b>@Baptist Church At 3pm</b>	<b>@Parish Church</b>	<b>@Village Hall</b>
	<b>TORRINGTON</b>	<b>WITH</b>	<b>ALVERDISCOTT</b>	<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>
<b>Alverdiscott 11am</b>	<b>F Watson</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Blackhall HC</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Torrington 10.30am</b>	<b>Blackhall</b>	<b>Whatton HC</b>	<b>Macbeth</b>	<b>Bate</b>
	<b>WEST</b>	<b>TORRIDGE</b>	<b>METHODIST</b>	<b>CHURCH</b>
<b>Buckland Brewer 10am (PC)</b>	<b>Hayes HC Parish Church @9.30am</b>	<b>D Watson Parish Church</b>		
<b>10am (MC)</b>			<b>NO SERVICE – SAFARI LUNCH</b>	<b>Harris</b>
<b>Littleham 10.30am</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Vidamour HC</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Withall</b>
<b>Parkham 11am</b>	<b>Vidamour HC</b>	<b>SB @10am</b>	<b>S Skinner @Parish Church @10am</b>	<b>S Skinner @Parish Church Rogation</b>

## Activities, Events and Meetings -

Thu 01	Philip and James, Apostles		
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Alverdiscott
Fri 02			
Sat 03	Coffee Morning	10:00-11:15	Northam
Sun 04	International Compost Week (until Sat 10)		
	Holy Communion	09:30	St Mary & St Benedict, Buckland Brewer
	Holy Communion	11:00	Parkham
Mon 05	Early May Bank Holiday		
Tue 06	Toddlers' Tune Time	09:00-10:30	Northam
	West Torridge Church Life/Pastoral Committee	19:00	Parkham
Wed 07	Mid Week Morning Prayer	09:30	Torrington
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Buckland Brewer
	Worship and Community Lunch <i>(Booking for Lunch required)</i>	11:30	Northam
	Torrington with Alverdiscott Pastoral Committee	14:30	Torrington
Thu 08	Bideford Pastoral Committee	10:00	Bideford
Fri 09			
Sat 10	Coffee Morning	10:00-11:15	Northam
	SWPD Representative Synod	10:00	Methodist Central Hall, Plymouth
Sun 11	Christian Aid Week (until Sat 17)		
	Coffee & Fellowship	10:30	Shebbear (Lake)
	Holy Communion	10:30	Littleham
	Holy Communion	10:30	Torrington
	Sunday Breakfast	11:00	Parkham
	Circuit Easter Offering Service	18:30	Zoom



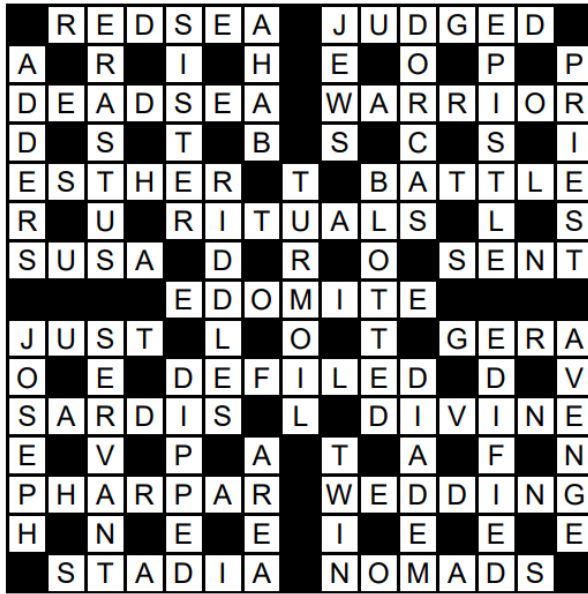
Mon 12	Mental Health Awareness Week (until Sun 18)		
	'Time Together' Toddler Group	09:30-11:30	Buckland Brewer
Tue 13	Toddlers' Tune Time	09:00-10:30	Northam
	Circuit Discussion Morning	10:00-12:00	Buckland Brewer
	Shebbear Church Life/Pastoral Committee	19:00	Milton Damerel
Wed 14	Matthias the Apostles		
	Mid Week Morning Prayer	09:30	Torrington
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Buckland Brewer
Thu 15	Thursday Fellowship (Cream Tea)	14:00	Yeomead, Northam
Fri 16	Endangered Species Day		
	Northam Pastoral Committee	14:00	Northam
Sat 17	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia		
	Coffee Morning	10:00-11:15	Northam
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Torrington
Sun 18	Aldersgate Sunday		
	Holy Communion	10:30	Bideford
	Café Worship	11:00	Milton Damerel
	Holy Communion	11:00	Alverdiscott
	Fellowship Service	16:00	Northam
Mon 19	'Time Together' Toddler Group	09:30-11:30	Buckland Brewer
Tue 20	Water Saving Week (until Mon 26)		
	World Bee Day		
	Toddlers' Tune Time	09:00-10:30	Northam
Wed 21	Mid Week Morning Prayer	09:30	Torrington
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Buckland Brewer
Thu 22	International Day of Biological Diversity		
Fri 23			

Sat 24	John and Charles Wesley, Evangelists, Hymn Writers, 1791 and 1788 (Wesley Day)		
	Coffee Morning	10:00-11:15	Northam
Sun 25	Rogation Sunday		
	Holy Communion	10:30	Northam
	Holy Communion	10:30	Shebbear (Lake)
	Rogation Service	11:00	St James's, Parkahm
Mon 26	Spring Bank Holiday		
Tue 27			
Wed 28	Mid Week Morning Prayer	09:30	Torrington
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Buckland Brewer
Thu 29	Ascension Day		
Fri 30			
Sat 31	The Visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth		
	Coffee Morning	10:00-11:15	Northam
	Coffee Morning	10:00-12:00	Bideford

#### **TEA TIME PUZZLE BREAK**

Apologies there was no Tea Time Puzzle Break in April, but here are March's Solutions and some new puzzles to get stuck into.

# BIBLE CROSSWORD XIV - SOLUTION

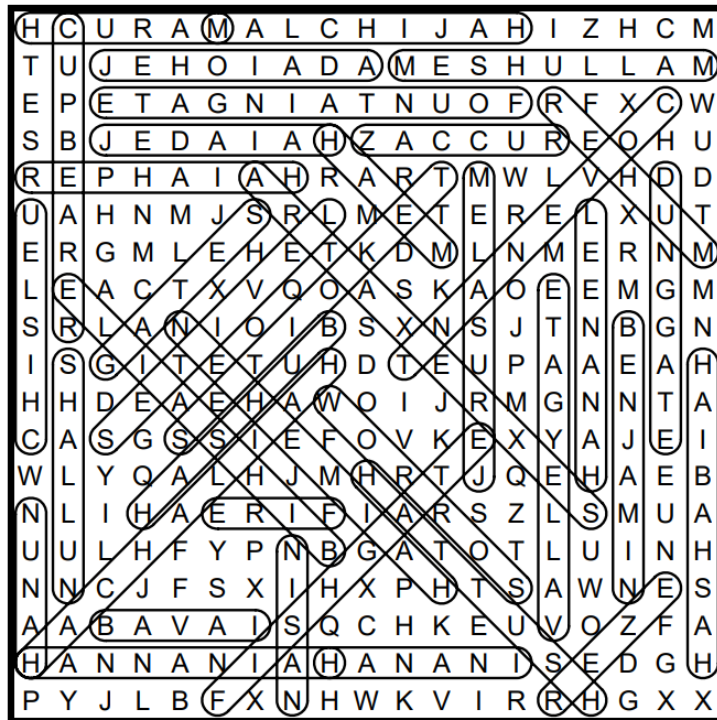


Across: 1 Red Sea, 5 Judged, 10 Dead Sea, 11 Warrior, 12 Esther, 15 Battle, 16 Rituals, 17 Susa, 18 Sent, 19 Edomite, 20 Just, 22 Gera, 25 Defiled, 27 Sardis, 28 Divine, 31 Pharpar, 32 Wedding, 33 Stadia, 34 Nomads.

Down: 2 Erastus, 3 Sister, 4 Ahab, 5 Jews, 6 Dorcas, 7 Epistle, 8 Adders, 9 Priest, 13 Riddles, 14 Turmoil, 15 Blotted, 20 Joseph, 21 Servant, 23 Edified, 24 Avenue, 25 Dipped, 26 Diadem, 29 Area, 30 Twin.

Bible Crossword by BiblePuzzles.com

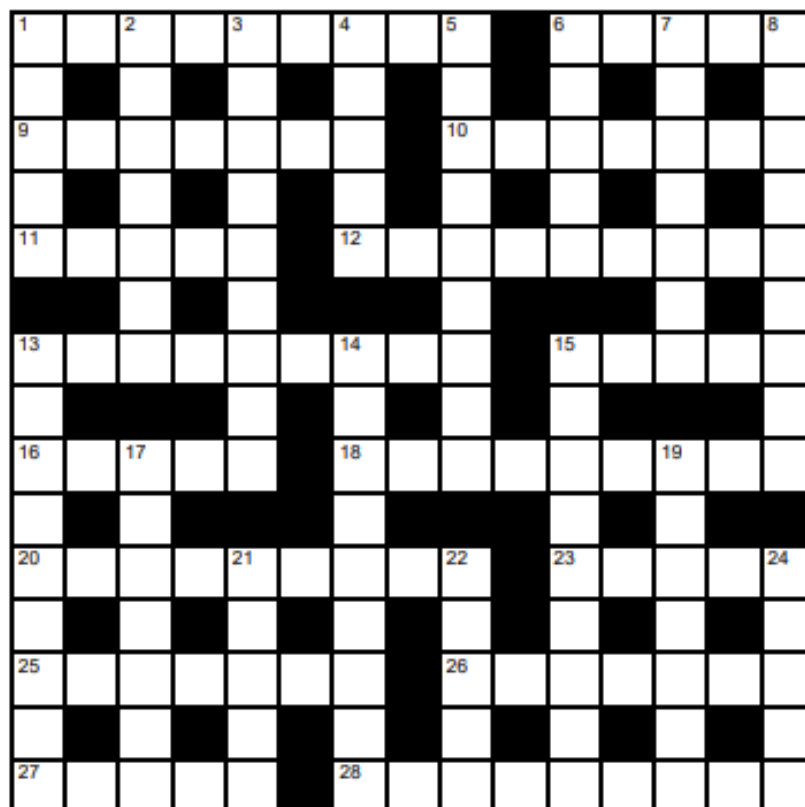
## Nehemiah Word Search - Solution



# BIBLE CROSSWORD XV

## Across

- 1 Word of God (9)  
 6 Korah, Dathan and Abiram fell into one (5)  
 9 Prophetess and judge (7)  
 10 Rescue (7)  
 11 Judas wore one around his neck (5)  
 12 In a fervent manner (9)  
 13 Age when Jehoram became king (6-3)  
 15 Long range of hills or mountains (5)  
 16 Like the tomb on Resurrection Morning (5)  
 18 Samson, maybe? (9)  
 20 Pharisaical tomb covering (9)  
 23 The beginning of a sequence (5)  
 25 Time when not working (7)  
 26 Alternative name for Feast of Tabernacles (7)  
 27 Region of Israeli enslavement (5)  
 28 One of 13 down (9)



by Philologus

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## Down

- 1 City near to Tyre (5)  
 2 Honourable title for a teacher (7)  
 3 In an ideal way (9)  
 4 Region famous for its gold (5)  
 5 Strive (9)  
 6 A city of Nimrod (5)  
 7 Counselling (7)  
 8 Golden covering of the ark (5,4)  
 13 Apostles, collectively (3,6)  
 14 New and old parts of the Bible (9)  
 15 Plundered (9)  
 17 Secretly (7)  
 19 Instruction for the twelve spies (7)  
 21 Jubilate (5)  
 22 Minor prophet (5)  
 24 Often put on the head during mourning (5)

# EASTER WORD SEARCH



BiblePuzzles.org.uk

- |                 |                  |                 |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| ANGELS          | HIGH PRIEST      | ROBE            |
| APOSTLES        | JESUS CHRIST     | ROMANS          |
| BETRAYAL        | JOSEPH           | SACRIFICE       |
| BLOOD           | JUDAS ISCARIOT   | SIMON OF CYRENE |
| CALVARY         | KING             | SOLDIERS        |
| CROSS           | LAMB             | SON OF GOD      |
| CROWN OF THORNS | MARY             | SPEAR           |
| CRUCIFIXION     | NAILS            | STONE           |
| DARKNESS        | PASSOVER         | TEMPLE          |
| DEATH           | PIECES OF SILVER | THIEVES         |
| EARTHQUAKE      | PIERCED          | THREE DAYS      |
| EASTER          | PILATE           | TOMB            |
| GOLGOTHA        | RESURRECTION     |                 |

## **SUPREME COURT GENDER RULING**

The President and Vice-President, along with the Secretary of the Methodist Conference, have released the following in response to the Supreme Court's ruling made on 16 April regarding gender.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, you made us in love,  
and each of us bear your image and likeness,  
we are wonderfully restored and renewed by the work of your Spirit.  
Help us to see and value the beauty of the gift of your diverse creation  
and so treat one another with the same tenderness we receive from you.  
May those who are frightened, uncertain or anxious  
know your comfort and our support.  
Amen

Revd Helen Cameron and Carolyn Godfrey  
President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

### **Statement**

Following the Supreme Court's judgment, many may feel anxious, hurt, or unsettled. We need to be clear: nothing in this ruling diminishes our determination to be an inclusive church. The Methodist Church believes that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, have a place in God's Church and trans people should always feel that they are welcome and loved. It is important that we reassert this in the light of some of the coverage of the Supreme Court's ruling; this is not a matter of 'winners' or 'losers', and to portray it as such is at best unhelpful and at worst an attempt to justify prejudice and discrimination. The Court made its ruling on a matter of the interpretation of the law. It determined what the provisions of The Equalities Act mean by defining who may or may not participate in some single-sex activities or way use certain single-sex facilities, and who is and is not protected against discrimination on the grounds of sex (whilst noting that trans people are protected against discrimination because they are trans – and that has not changed).

It is likely that this presents an issue in very few churches, but should a question arise, please address it to [soc@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:soc@methodistchurch.org.uk) and the Team will do its best to offer clear guidance. Although the ruling is likely to present an issue in only a few places, the effect on those who feel excluded and uncertain is wider and deeper. Anyone in that position, and wanting pastoral support should contact the local minister or superintendent, District EDI Officer or Connexional Inclusion Team.

The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler  
The Secretary of the Conference

## WEST DEVON CIRCUIT – HERITAGE EXHIBITION

Dissenting voices is a touring exhibition celebrating the diverse history & life of the Methodist Church in West Devon.

Come & be immersed in the story, explored through writing, art & song, surrounded by artefacts & photographs celebrating Methodist life.

Open from 10am followed by a concert at 4pm with JimCausley & friends – refreshments available throughout.

These events take place on Saturdays throughout the Circuit.

May 31<sup>st</sup> @Boasley

June 28<sup>th</sup> @Bridestowe

July 26<sup>th</sup> @Winkleigh

30<sup>th</sup> August @Northlew.

### **Making bread for Easter with Bob Cross and the Boblets**

A Church in Cardiff has recently made (and maintained!) a sourdough starter, growing with it the involvement of the congregation and the community, and with activities ranging from baking sourdough goods to discussing bread in the Bible.

#### **Bob Cross**

“Who is feeding Bob today?” is a sentence often heard recently within the Conway Road Methodist Church congregation recently. Bob is not a child or an animal, but a sourdough starter who has become the unlikely star of this Cardiff church's Lenten journey.

What began as a simple idea to bring people together in Wales Synod Cymru has risen into something far more meaningful. Philippa, a congregation member, was inspired by BBC Radio 4's The Food Programme and suggested a communal sourdough project to Deacon Laura Evans as a way to unite the various groups who use the church building.

"It grew organically from there," explains Laura. "We started on the first Sunday of Lent. We got the junior church together, and they mixed the flour and the water." The plan was to distribute portions the following week, but nature follows its own timetable. "Unfortunately, because it's a natural process, it wasn't ready until the 23rd."

The youngest church members have embraced the project from feeding Bob to kneading and baking. Ella, a child from the congregation, shares her enthusiasm: "I think the sourdough is very nice and it's going to be very tasty. We have already made lovely pancakes and lovely cake with it."

#### **Bob and the community**

In the meantime, the church building's diverse community has become invested in nurturing the starter. "Theo groups that use the building were heavily involved with making sure that the sourdough was fed," Laura recalls. "Watching the little ones get so excited because it's bubbling and showing signs of being alive is incredible."

The starter needed a name and thus Bob Cross was born – a playful nod to both its church origins and the Easter season. The small portions distributed to congregation members became known as Boblets, sparking humour and conversation throughout the community.

"It's done wonders for the congregation," says Laura. "People have been talking about Boblets and naming their sourdoughs. Mine is called Breadward. Philippa's one is Sid and we know somebody else who's called theirs Gordon."

The spiritual significance has not been lost on the congregation. Philippa explains one of the most fascinating aspects: "The sourdough picks up the bacteria from the air around it to make the yeast. Sitting on his shelf in the church kitchen, Bob absorbs the goodness in the air, and that same goodness is in every Boblet that people take home."

### **Bob and the Bible**

This has provided rich material for sermons and discussions. "As a minister, I have had a blast preaching about this," Laura enthuses. "This tiny thing, which is barely significant, but does so much to a loaf of bread – there's something utterly miraculous about it. The sourdough starter gets its life from the goings on around it, so the Boblets are strongly connected to this community and the worship, fun and fellowship that takes place here."

The project has also connected congregants to biblical traditions. "When we read about bread, leavened bread, in the Bible, what we're talking about is a form of what we would now call sourdough," Laura points out. "What we're doing, even though it feels terribly modern, is actually something that's been going on for thousands of years. Something that Jesus mentions in the gospels."

Bob's journey culminates over Easter weekend, with hot cross buns planned for Good Friday and sourdough contributions to the traditional Easter morning breakfast. "We've invited people to bring along things that they've made with their sourdough to share," Philippa explains.

But Bob's story won't end at Easter. The starter will be reduced and stored dormant in the refrigerator, ready to be revived for future church events. "For every event where we can shoehorn bread into it, I feel like bread will be shoehorned into it," Laura laughs.

Follow the Conway Road Methodist Church Facebook group [here](#) to learn more about Bob Cross, the Boblets and general bread facts