



Introducing Rev'd Jennie Hurd

Chair of Wales Synod Cymru of the Methodist Church

No one could have been more surprised than I was to receive a phone call in May 1998 from my District Chair, asking would I go to Wales, would I go to a single minister circuit, would I learn Welsh? She was ringing from a stationing meeting about the placing of ministers, and although I'd suggested I'd like a challenge for my second circuit appointment, I hadn't expected that much of a challenge! However, I visited the circuit, Y Glannau in the former Cymru District, and agreed to the appointment, and the rest, as you might say, is history. I went to Y Glannau from being a probationer in the Nuneaton and Atherstone Circuit in the Birmingham District (1993-1999); following Y Glannau, I served as Superintendent in the Dudley and Netherton Circuit in the Wolverhampton District (2004-2009), and after a period with Permission to Study (2009-2013), I returned to Wales as District Chair of Synod Cymru and Superintendent of the Cymru Circuit. On 1st September 2022, I became a District Chair of Wales Synod Cymru, and the appointment is an honour and a privilege.



Introducing Jennie Hurd continued

Why was I so surprised back in May 1998? I was born and grew up in East Yorkshire, and I can honestly say that I have no family connections with Wales whatsoever. Until 1998, my visits to Wales had mainly been to walk in the hills and enjoy the glorious coast and country. I hadn't indicated at all that I was looking to serve in Wales: I had my husband's employment to consider, and that meant hoping for an appointment in the Midlands or on Merseyside. Moreover, I didn't speak Welsh – French to first degree level, yes, and 'O' Level German and Latin, but no Welsh. However, languages don't frighten me (though numbers do!), so when I started to learn 'the language of heaven' with a view to my relocation, I fell in love with its lyricism, complexity, colourfulness and beauty. It's a love affair that continues.

I am married to Pete, a Pensions Manager and possibly the most patient man in the world. Before I trained for the ministry at the Queens Foundation in Birmingham, I worked for the Student Christian Movement (SCM), an ecumenical organisation that strengthened a commitment to ecumenism that remains to this day. I love to read, walk, go to the cinema and theatre, travel (especially to sacred sites and places) and swim, though not with any great skill, speed or elegance! My passion is for people to know that God in Christ loves, receives and treasures them, and for us to become fully the people God intends each of us to be. I am enchanted by the beauty, diversity and richness of God's creation – especially people – and I long for us to live together in love, care, compassion, peace and justice, to God's greater glory. I have two (three!) favourite Bible verses: Romans 8: 38-39 and Matthew 6: 33 – the indestructible love of God for us and the priority of God's Kingdom.

I believe very strongly that this increasingly bilingual nation of Wales needs a bilingual, ecumenical Christian church to share the love of God in Christ with all and to serve our neighbours the best we can. Reflecting the grace of God, when first-language English speakers and first-language Welsh-speakers come together, we enrich and strengthen each other; our witness is more effective and our worship honours and gives God the glory. I am so grateful for the way in which my horizons have been widened, and continue to widen, by learning Welsh, including culturally, linguistically, theologically, musically, spiritually and relationally. Someone once told me that learning a new language is like throwing wide open another window in your house – it lets more light and fresh air in and gives you a clearer view of things. The Welsh language has taught me more about God, and I hope and pray that as a Synod, we will be able to share our faith more effectively together with everyone.

It has been a privilege to share the first year of the life of the Synod as Chair with Revd Dr Stephen Wigley, and I look forward to the colleagueship of Revd Andrew Charlesworth, our new Chair, from September this year. The future will bring its challenges, but as John Wesley is alleged to have said, "The best of all is, God is with us" – "Y gorau un yw mae Duw gyda ni."

'The Suffering God' – the Superintendent's Easter Letter

One year I spent Easter in Italy and was fortunate to visit the basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, which at the time of its being built in the thirteenth century, was one of the largest churches in the world.

Santa Croce has many stories to tell: here you find the tomb of the great scientist Galileo Galilei: the fact that the tomb is here at all is a reminder of the Church's ability eventually to acknowledge the truth of things and recognise its own faults, since for well over a century Galileo's body was refused entry on the grounds that he had denied what was regarded as biblical truth by asserting that the earth went round the sun and not vice versa.



On the opposite side of the church is a great memorial to Florence's most famous son, the novelist Dante Alighieri. My mind jumped to the words in the resurrection stories: 'He is not here, he is risen.' Dante is not here either; he is in Ravenna (and they won't give him back).

But the thing that struck me most of all at Santa Croce was not to be found inside the church but off the cloisters of what was once the accompanying Franciscan monastery. There in the refectory is displayed the huge wooden Crucifixion painted by the great artist Cimabue in the thirteenth century; one of those mature Byzantine-style crosses where Christ's body snakes up the cross and your eyes are drawn upwards to meet the serene face of the one crucified.



For about seven hundred years this pre-Renaissance masterpiece remained one of the great treasures of a city full of masterpieces; but then in November 1966 the river Arno burst its banks and Florence suffered its worst ever flood on record. In our hotel room lobby nearby there was a plaque just below the ceiling to mark where the water managed to rise to over 14 feet. The flood was devastating in its destruction of lives and livelihoods and in the damage it wreaked on Florence's works of art.



Cimabue's Crucifixion was one of the truly irreplaceable works that was irreparably damaged - before the disaster your gaze was taken up the body to the face of Christ and thence to the figure of God watching from above; but after the flood came and washed away the central section of the painting, it left behind only the half-obliterated face of the Crucified, his eyes now sealed in some secret and terrible pain - and the water also completely destroyed the figure of God.

My guide book noted bluntly that the crucifix was "ruined." But nothing is ever lost, and looking at the new picture, created through

this tragedy, it struck me as it did others before, that it now had a new and powerful lesson to teach us: if God is to be recognised anywhere in this scene it is no longer as some distracted observer, hovering overhead and uninvolved in the action, but as someone who has become wholly absorbed within the brokenness of the man on the cross

We know that on the cross, according to the earliest gospel of Mark, Jesus felt abandoned by God. Some have developed from this a full-blown belief not only that God did indeed leave Jesus there to die, but that he had to because his honour demanded it. There are a few hymns in our hymn book that focus on this idea of the wrath of God, requiring satisfaction through the death of a victim in our place. It's one (only one) of some of the atonement theories the early Church came up with to try and explain what on earth was happening on the cross. I'm afraid I don't generally pick or sing these kinds of hymns. For me it's very dangerous (although not impossible) to preach an angry God. But I would always focus on the God who loves us.

As we reflect on the continuing war in Ukraine and now in Sudan, on increasing tensions between North and South Korea, China and Taiwan, as we hear of more shootings in the USA; as we remain mindful of those, whose lives have recently been shattered by earthquakes, eruptions, tornadoes and floods and as we think on friends and family known to us, who are going through difficult times at the moment, the cross has to be able to speak to us of a God who will not let us go, but who is caught up in every hardship we suffer and, through his suffering with us, is able to bring us safely home.

Rev'd Nick Sissons, Easter 2023



wild Worship



Four Outdoor Walks with Worship marking the turning of the seasons –



On Tuesday 21st March, a group of 12 members from the Circuit, plus two dogs, enjoyed a lovely walk around the Vaynol Estate. The walk, apart from being good exercise on a fresh but fortunately sunny morning, was also to enjoy, really observe, and reflect on our surroundings. At various points along the way, we stopped and considered what we were grateful for from what we could see, what our relationship with nature involved, and how it made us feel.

The walk was organised by Nick Sissons and John Hay and they had asked us to bring along a poem, hymn or reading about Spring which really reflected what the season meant to us.

These poems were read out by the group when we reached the furthest point on the walk overlooking Felinheli and the Straits.. Nick said a short prayer of thanks to summarise our observations and reflections on the whole experience.

Everyone enjoyed the walk and arrived back at the car park very muddy but very happy , especially the dogs! To end the walk, some of us went to the Ty Golchi restaurant nearby and shared a much deserved lunch. All in all, a very pleasant event which will be repeated at the beginning of the other seasons of the year. So look out for June 21st!

Norma Caughter, St John's



Getting to Know You – David Connolly, member of St Paul's, Penmaenmawr

Tell us a little about your family background

I was born in Garston, Liverpool in the late 1950s. My mother was an only child who lived and worked in the area before meeting my father who was a submariner of some 12 years in the Royal Navy. My parents, sister and myself lived

in a rented 2 up 2 down with a shed extension as a kitchen; I can fondly remember bath nights when we had to transfer hot water from a twin tub washing machine to a separate cast iron bath!



Church life started early when I was about 9 years old, I was recruited with several of my school friends to St Michael's Parish Church Choir. This required attendance at choir practice (1 hour Wednesday and 2 hours Friday nights) plus 2 Sunday services and as a bonus any Saturday weddings. The choirmaster and organist was a music teacher by profession and imposed high expectations on the choir members; some even made it to sing at the Service of Remembrance in the Royal Albert Hall one year.



The photos show me at my confirmation in 1970 (middle of the bottom row) and my final year in the choir in 1974 (at the back).

2. After school what did you do?

I attended Liverpool Institute High School and would occasionally gaze out of the window to see another sandstone block being hoisted up to complete the Anglican Cathedral structure. I studied hard to successfully pass my 'O' and 'A' level GCE's by which time I had had enough of academia and studying. I had taken up cycle touring for a few years by then and enjoyed 5 months of the long hot summer of '76 before

succumbing to the Job Centre's attempts to force me into some form of gainful employment. I had no clearly identified aspirational profession to pursue so I was offered a job at a local Chemical Factory as a laboratory Assistant. I continued to work there for a further 22 years having progressed through college to become a "Process Technologist."

David Connolly continued

3. What would you identify as the key moments on your Christian journey? I continued as a chorister till my late teens but ceased attending church with a 'broken' voice and because the local Cyclist Touring Club always had their cycle rides on a Sunday! The photo shows my mother and me with my 'passport to freedom.'



Primarily, I think I had reached a point that I didn't feel inspired or stirred spiritually and I was wasting my time to continue church when there was a big wide world to explore.

4. What is it about the person of Jesus that most attracts you to him?

I have a very simplistic view on my faith in Jesus and believe that in some of my times of deepest crisis Jesus has been there to catch me when I have felt that I have been falling into an abyss of no return. I think of 'Footprints' and "it was then that I carried you."

5. If you could change one thing about the church you belong to (whether that is the local church, national or global church) what would it be and why would you want to change it?

I would not like to see one change but probably several. In our church services the old-fashioned hymns and unfamiliar tunes are a struggle and not always relatable to the 21st century. Perhaps sermons or talks should be based on present day personal life stories and relevant testimony instead of traditionally analysing scriptures from the Old Testament etc.

6. If you could only say one thing to someone about what is most important in life what would you say?

I would say be kind, respectful, considerate, and loving to all those that you meet and mix with no matter how you come across them. I have a strange but unusual view point on this; just consider that the person you are dealing with could be Jesus himself incognito, after all, is there not spiritually a bit of Jesus in all of us?

How to stay sane and calm whilst being tortured.

Howard Jackson member at St Johns Bangor and local preacher

During the Autumn, I underwent a six-week course of radiotherapy at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. It was quite an interesting, if exhausting experience. I was having treatment for cancer of the vocal chords, which was confined to the voice box. The course started with the production of a face mask. This entailed lying very still on a steel table whilst a temperature-sensitive plastic sheet was draped over my head and shoulders. The sheet was securely anchored to the table round the edges. As the plastic cooled down, it moulded itself to the exact shape and size of my head and shoulders. This was done in conjunction with a CT scan, so that the precise position of the cancerous area could be recorded on the mask with it in position.

Ten days later, the treatment started. The car journeys from home to Glan Clwyd were not too taxing, because family and friends helped with the driving. The autumn colour of the countryside on the way along the A55 was unbelievably beautiful and lasted for the whole course of treatment. The radiotherapy department is in a new part of Ysbyty Glan Clwyd at the far end of the site. It is all very spacious with lighting wells containing small gardens with interesting sculptures in addition to plants. When I got to the radiotherapy department, there was just a short wait in the sunlit waiting room. It was all designed to create a pleasant experience.

But then the actual radiotherapy starts. The treatment room has no natural light. In the centre is a steel table with adjustable height. On one wall are two computer screens, one of them showing your details. The ceiling seems to be almost covered by a huge machine with a curved arm, at the top of which is a circular glass window. Your mask is waiting on the table. The radiographers ask you to strip to the waist, remove shoes and dentures and then sit in the middle of the table. You swing round, bring your feet up into the foot rest and lie back with your head in the headrest. Then the mask is put over your head and shoulders. It is a very close fit on your face, neck and shoulders. Then the radiographers lock it in place to keep your head, neck and shoulders rigidly in position. The locks are like the plastic sprung-loaded fasteners that keep the external plastic trim in place on your car. They apply a good deal of pressure to keep your head and neck absolutely still.

The radiographers check on the accuracy of the mask's position under the machine and then retire to a safe distance. The lights go out and the table raises itself to about 2m off the floor. Then the radiation doses begin. Now just imagine being in that position. It's very claustrophobic. The machine whirrs and the table moves at times.



Howards article continued

And there you are in the dark, tied down very tightly by the head to it. Very unsettling. It would be an excellent way to torture someone. So how do you pass the time? It's only about five minutes, but it seems to go on for ever.

My way was to start by invoking God's presence with the words "Seek the sound of silence that speaks of God's presence", followed by recalling one of Jesus' sayings. "Come to me all you weary and overburdened and I will refresh you. Try on my yoke and learn from me, because my yoke fits well and my burdens are light and you will find rest for your souls." Finally I continued by slowly reciting a favourite hymn – Lord I come to you – using my heart-beat to time each word. The effect of all this was just what I needed to get through it and stay relaxed and calm. By the time I got to the chorus "Hold me close, let your love surround me ..." for the second time, the radiographer would be there unlocking me.

That went on for six weeks, Monday to Friday. On the last day, I was given the mask, then invited to sound the "departure bell" on the wall outside the waiting room. What a

Lord I come to you

Lord I come to you, let my heart be changed, renewed

Flowing from the grace that I've found in you.

And lord I've come to know the weaknesses i see in me

Will be stripped away by the power of your love.

Chorus:

Hold me close, let your love surround me

Bring me near, draw me to your side.

And as I wait I'll rise up like the eagle

And I will soar with you, your spirit leads me on

In the power of your love.

Lord unveil my eyes, let me see you face to face

The knowledge of your love as you live in me.

Lord renew my mind, as your will unfolds in my life

In living every day in the power of your love.

Chorus.

A Visit to the Mosque in Bangor

Most people will be unaware that inter-faith issues have always been high on my agenda ever since I studied for the ministry at Wesley House, Cambridge in the late 1980s under the guidance of the Rev'd Kenneth Cracknell, one of the leading practitioners in the field. I was a member of the Methodist Inter Faith Committee throughout the 1990s and represented the Methodist Church on the equivalent ecumenical body (the Churches Council for Inter Faith Relations). I was particularly involved with the Council of Christians and Jews, which, incidentally, led to my being presented to the Queen on CCJ's 50th anniversary celebration at St James' Palace in 1998. When I first came to Wales in 2001 I was appointed the North Wales District Inter Faith Advisor, but once we became a whole Synod in 2007 and the South Wales District person moved on, it became rather hard to cover the whole of the country. However as a result of becoming a chaplain at Bangor University I have once again tried to become more active in this area.



As a result of a discussion in March about inter-faith relations at the University between myself, Stephen Jones and Ammar, a Bangladeshi Muslim business student, it was suggested that the local Christian and Muslim communities in Bangor might like to explore some practical ways of getting to know each other better. Initiatives of this kind have happened in the past but not much has taken place recently and certainly not since COVID.

I had paid a visit to the masjid (the Arabic name for a mosque), on the High Street in Bangor just across from St John's, one Friday prayers in February, the week of the terrible Turkey/Syria earthquake, in order to express Christian solidarity with our Muslim neighbours and I was very warmly welcomed in by them and even invited to address the congregation. Ammar facilitated this with Mr Gibani, the Secretary of the masjid and this opened up the way for a suggestion that during the holy Muslim month of Ramadhan an invitation might be extended to some local Christians to join the Muslim community in breaking their fast one evening after sunset. This took place on April 18th during the final week of Ramadhan.



An invitation for ten people was offered and in the event eight people went, seven from St John's, which is situated almost opposite the masjid, and Fr Adrian the local Roman Catholic priest. Those of us who didn't realise it were delighted to discover that the Secretary, Mr Gibani, and June Cooper from St John's were old colleagues from the hospital at Ysbyty Gwynedd (see the photo). In fact, Mr Gibani described June as his 'teacher' and said that according to his tradition (he comes from Libya) you always remain a slave to your teacher, in other words you are forever in their debt. This was a lovely way to begin our evening, as it created a special bond straightaway. Initially we all stayed together whilst the Secretary shared information about Ramadhan and the various religious practices associated with it and with the Eid festival that follows. Then we split up, the women staying downstairs with the Muslim women

in their Prayer Room and the men going upstairs with the Muslim men to their prayer space.

Upstairs, we all sat on the floor (seats were provided if we wanted to use them) and once the sun had set at 8.22 (signalled by the call to prayer) we spent around twenty minutes eating some light foods, beginning with dates, according to the custom of the Prophet Muhammad. Then the Muslims offered their prayers and afterwards we ate more substantially. All the while there were opportunities to share conversation and learn about the practice of fasting.

Our gracious host, the Secretary, noted that this year, possibly because of the rising food costs, the number of people coming every evening to the masjid had risen from around 60 last year to about 120. In this final week of Ramadhan a restaurateur from Bethesda has taken it upon himself to produce all those meals at his own expense. Earlier in the month other families have either cooked food themselves or paid for the masjid to be able to feed everyone who turns up.

It was a very enjoyable and moving experience for those of us who went and the intention is that in the autumn there will be a Harvest Supper offered as an opportunity for the Christian community to repay the invitation. If anybody in the Circuit is interested in getting involved and helping us think through how such an event can best be organised and generally to share their thoughts on how we can develop our relationships with the local Muslim communities, then please do get in touch with me.

Rev'd Nick Sissons

A Holy Week Wordsearch




All the words below are things that appear in the Holy Week story according to the Gospel of St. Mark (chapters 14.12 to 16.8 - NIV translation).

Name: _____

Holyweek Word Search

S	P	I	C	E	S	L	A	R	V	U	A	P	X	S	Y	L	I	N	E	N	W	Q
K	J	X	O	U	N	Y	D	M	N	M	W	E	I	L	J	F	E	F	V	T	D	E
S	L	C	X	U	O	M	D	A	A	K	J	B	C	R	O	S	S	G	R	A	E	O
J	S	U	N	R	I	S	E	R	R	R	J	W	X	L	H	K	H	L	B	B	K	F
M	S	L	J	W	J	K	Z	F	K	K	F	F	B	Q	F	R	G	L	B	V	E	E
G	B	S	J	W	T	H	O	V	I	Q	N	L	R	C	B	M	W	U	A	J	P	W
Y	X	C	K	U	U	T	A	S	W	R	W	E	J	X	W	Q	N	K	A	K	C	S
V	K	I	E	I	Q	Y	B	I	O	Y	E	F	S	X	A	M	F	S	T	W	L	T
B	T	S	W	N	S	O	W	B	H	L	O	W	Q	S	E	G	N	O	P	S	U	M
O	I	T	K	C	T	S	R	V	N	I	A	T	R	U	C	V	R	Y	H	K	B	N
S	H	O	V	N	V	U	L	O	Z	C	B	V	S	D	Q	R	E	B	R	R	S	M
F	W	N	G	H	O	C	R	A	J	I	G	F	M	L	F	C	T	Q	R	Y	P	D
P	H	E	L	C	G	X	M	I	M	A	R	O	B	E	C	K	S	V	Y	V	U	Y
G	K	L	O	J	H	B	Z	F	O	B	M	N	N	A	P	N	O	Z	M	Q	C	Y
W	S	A	M	V	V	H	R	W	Q	N	V	H	E	V	D	X	O	Z	V	Q	W	F
I	B	R	R	D	P	E	Q	P	V	L	X	B	R	E	A	D	R	O	C	J	L	U

Find the following words in the puzzle.

Words are hidden     and .

BREAD
CENTURION
CLUBS
CROSS
CUP
CURTAIN
DARKNESS

EAR
FIRE
KISS
LAMB
LINEN
MYRRH
ROBE

ROOSTER
SKULL
SPICES
SPONGE
STONE
SUNRISE

A Verse to Live By

Trish Dann, member at Amlwch Methodist Church

In my family whenever we have had a special Church service my favourite bible passage 1 Corinthians, chapter 13 vs 1-13 has always been included. I read these words at my Mother-in-law's funeral where the Minister elaborated on the word LOVE, reminding us of the unconditional love and support given to us by our Mothers.

Whenever I hear these bible words again it makes me ponder how often do we 'thank' our Mothers, for where would we be without them?

In addition, I draw inspiration, on those occasions when feeling despondent, not from an appropriate Bible passage to 'lift my spirits' but from the writings of Helen Steiner Rice. Her poems and verses are so meaningful that I always find something to motivate me to move forward day by day.

A book of prayers—can you help?

At the last Local Preachers meeting, those present endorsed the idea of a Circuit Project to create a book of prayers which we could either publish or send out as an e book for payment of a small fee, and with the idea of raising some funds for the charities and projects we support.

John Hay and Julian Bonnebaigt are going to be coordinating this and would welcome contributions from anyone, not just the Local Preachers or Worship Leaders. At the moment their thinking is to create something along the lines of the Donald Hilton collection, Seasons and Celebrations with various sections and themes, some based on the Christian Calendar (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Harvest etc.) and others of a more modern slant (Eco/Environmental issues, Justice and Peace, Poverty issues, welcome and inclusivity, Christian Unity to name but a few).

The purpose of the book would be to provide a resource for individuals to use in their personal prayer times and worship leaders or Local Preachers to use in services or prayer meetings. The prayers themselves, can be short or long, prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, dedication, intercessory, contemplative, inviting use of imagination or direct. There are no rules as such except one – ANY CONTRIBUTION MUST BE ORIGINAL, NOT A COPIED PRAYER WITH THE ODD WORD CHANGED. If you have any pictures or photos you would like to accompany, then all the better!

If you have any contributions, either something you have done before or something you write specifically for this project then please send to either John or Julian preferably by email. Also, if you have any thoughts or ideas about how best to format this or other sections not included above, or any observations at all in fact, then again please let John or Julian know. Their email addresses are

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