Connexion

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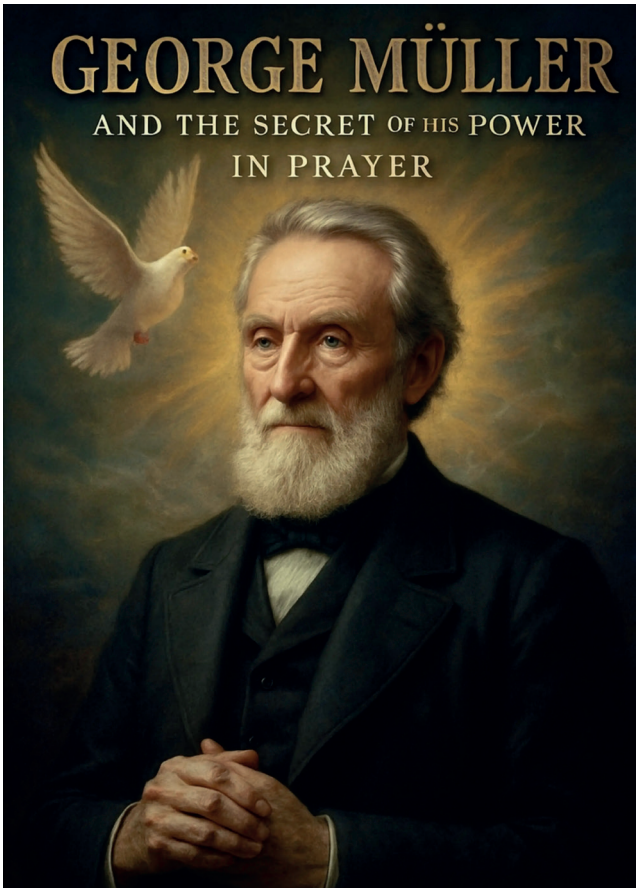
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Christmas was the ultimate spiritual breakthrough

Have you ever prayed for something for a really long time, with no evidence of an answer? George Mueller, a British man who fed hundreds of orphans in the 1800s, prayed every day for the salvation of five men.



The first man was converted after 18 months, and the second surrendered to Jesus after five more years. The third man gave his life to Christ after Mueller had prayed for six more years.

The last two men were still not Christians when Mueller died in 1897, even though he had prayed for them daily for 52 years. But history records that both of them were converted after his death! Mueller's testimony inspires me to be consistent in prayer, even when I feel tempted to give up on a promise from God.

The Christmas story is also a testimony of answered prayer, although few people look at the birth of Jesus that way.



One of my favourite scenes in the nativity story occurs when Joseph and Mary bring the baby Jesus to the temple for His dedication. There, they meet Simeon and Anna, two elderly followers of the Lord who have been praying for years for the arrival of the promised Messiah.

Luke's Gospel says of Simeon that 'it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2:26).

We don't know how long this old man had prayed, but it was probably multiple decades. Things didn't look hopeful at that time, especially with Roman armies occupying Israel.



Imagine his joy when he walked into the temple that day. He realised that God had finally answered his consistent requests. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms and said, "… my eyes have seen Your salvation" (v 30). Anna, who was 84, never left the temple because she was praying continually for the arrival of the Messiah. She erupted in joy when she met the baby Jesus and his parents – 'and she continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (v 38). Obviously a faithful remnant of Old Testament believers were praying, groaning and travailing for God's promise to become a reality.

The Christmas story revolves around a joyful birth, but it was also the culmination of a long and painful process. Mary carried the baby Jesus for nine months, but the gestation period for the Messiah took centuries. Ancient prophets, dating back to the time of Moses, had declared that the Messiah was coming. Even in the darkest times of Israel's history, when the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, prayer warriors believed and claimed these promises:

• Isaiah predicted that a child would be born who would be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6). He also prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus came that a virgin would miraculously conceive and give birth to the Messiah, and that His name would be called 'Immanuel,' or 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14).

• The prophet Micah prophesied sometime around 700 B.C. that the Messiah would be born in the small town of Bethlehem, and that He would rule over Israel (Micah 5:2).

• Solomon actually predicted that kings of the east would bow down and worship the Messiah and offer him gifts (Psalm 72:10-11). This was fulfilled when the magi visited the baby Jesus, and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

• Jeremiah prophesied about Herod's horrible slaughter of babies in Bethlehem, a reminder that the devil would violently oppose the coming of the Saviour (Jeremiah 31:15).

• Hosea predicted that the Messiah would come out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). This was fulfilled when Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to Egypt for a short time while Herod was plotting to kill Him.

When the Messiah came in human flesh, He entered this world 'in the fullness of time' (Galatians 4:4). He didn't come on our schedule, but His timing was perfect. To us, God's promises may seem slow in coming – but He is never late.

As you celebrate the coming of Jesus, I pray you will also remember that all of God's promises are guaranteed. Don't stop praying. Don't look at dark circumstances and lose hope. Be patient and press through the pain.

Lee Grady (taken from the Cornerstone, Nelson church magazine)

Lesley and Phillippe have sent news from their previous country. They praise God for people are accessing resources through social media.

Recently, there were a large number of video plays of the "Lives of the Prophets" and Psalm 51. Let's pray for the seeds that were sown to take root. Pray that they will remember the words they heard and be changed by them. They give thanks for so many praying for the region. There are prayer teams planned to travel in the region this month and into the future. Let's pray that some of the participants would receive a call to come back and work in there. Let's continue to ask for more people to have a heart to pray for this area.

Housing prices, food, and other basics continue to rise while many struggle to make ends meet. Pray for the impoverished in the area to have their needs met. Pray that God would raise them up out of poverty as Psalm 113:7 declares. Pray for opportunities for believers to interact with people in need so that they can generously give from what God has entrusted to them.

Continue to pray for encouragement and a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit on those working in the area. Ask for rest and refreshment. Pray Psalm 23:3, that God will lead them on paths of righteousness for His name's sake.


W.Midlands group

David and Mary report that, after the exciting summer programme of annual Camp and return visits to Thailand, there is usually a 'down time' in the monthly fellowship meetings, with low attendance, and lost momentum. Would it be the same this year, or could they hope for something different? Looking at various groups they realize that despite the difficult situations before them, something different was taking place. As such they can look forward to a new lease of life in the coming months.

For example the West Midlands group, despite having lost several members due to a relationship difficulty, is beginning to regroup. They continue to hold things together, and are making use of homes they had not considered using before.


Student group

Similarly the Colchester group, instead of 'going down' when they discovered that their hired meeting room was not available, decided to change the day, time and venue of their meeting. An alternative church building is now available in nearby Billericay, where they hope to see two more Thai people added to the group.

The London student group usually loses most of its members at the end of the academic year, when many of the students return home to Thailand. However in the first meeting of this new 'season', the meeting was filled with a additional group of Thai students happy to discover the Christian way.

Ken Irwin - Age 90 years.
Cherry Lane IM Church, Lymm.



Our much-loved Minister, Pastor and friend to all who knew him. A congregation of some two hundred people comprising family and friends from the Connexion and beyond gathered at Cherry Lane to give thanks and to celebrate Ken's life, ministry and legacy. To accommodate those attending the service was relayed to specially erected gazebos at the rear of the Church.

Ken had been a Connexional Minister for fifty-nine years and served the denomination as Connexional President from 2007 to 2009.

He also served the Connexion for many years as Temperance and Social Services Secretary which later became Christian Responsibility. Ken played his part in the National Youth Temperance Council (NYTC) having himself committed to total abstinence from alcohol by signing the pledge in 1964. For many years he was social organiser at Eastwood Grange Summer School.
Ken began attending Friars Green after being invited to go and play football at the church. He soon joined the Sunday School and so began his journey to faith and service, first as a Sunday School Teacher, then a Connexional Minister and Church Leader.
He married his late wife Anne at Latchford Methodist Church where the Minister conducting the service advised the couple to worship together and so they settled at Friars Green serving the Lord particularly with their work amongst young people. The Sunday night fellowship that they held in their own home provided many young people with Christian Fellowship and led to many receiving Christ.
In the early 1980's Ken and Anne were called by God to serve him at Cherry Lane Church, Lymm. The congregation there was much smaller and older, but the couple began a children's work and as a result the church grew. Later Ken felt led to focus his ministry and that of the church on the elderly congregation who resided in the local community surrounding the church.
Alongside Ken's commitment to Cherry Lane, his desire to preach God's Word at every opportunity never diminished and his diary was booked solid with appointments at Connexional Churches and beyond. Ken also made many close and long-lasting friendships right across the denomination helping many to faith and supporting others in their own ministries.

The service to celebrate Ken's life and ministry was led by Peter Gleave. Sue, Ken's daughter, shared the family's reflections on behalf of herself and her brother Stephen and the grandchildren about their dad and grandad.

Ken had chosen the hymns and Bible readings himself, including Psalm 23 and his own personal favourite and signature verse of Romans 1v16: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Jew first and also to the Greeks".

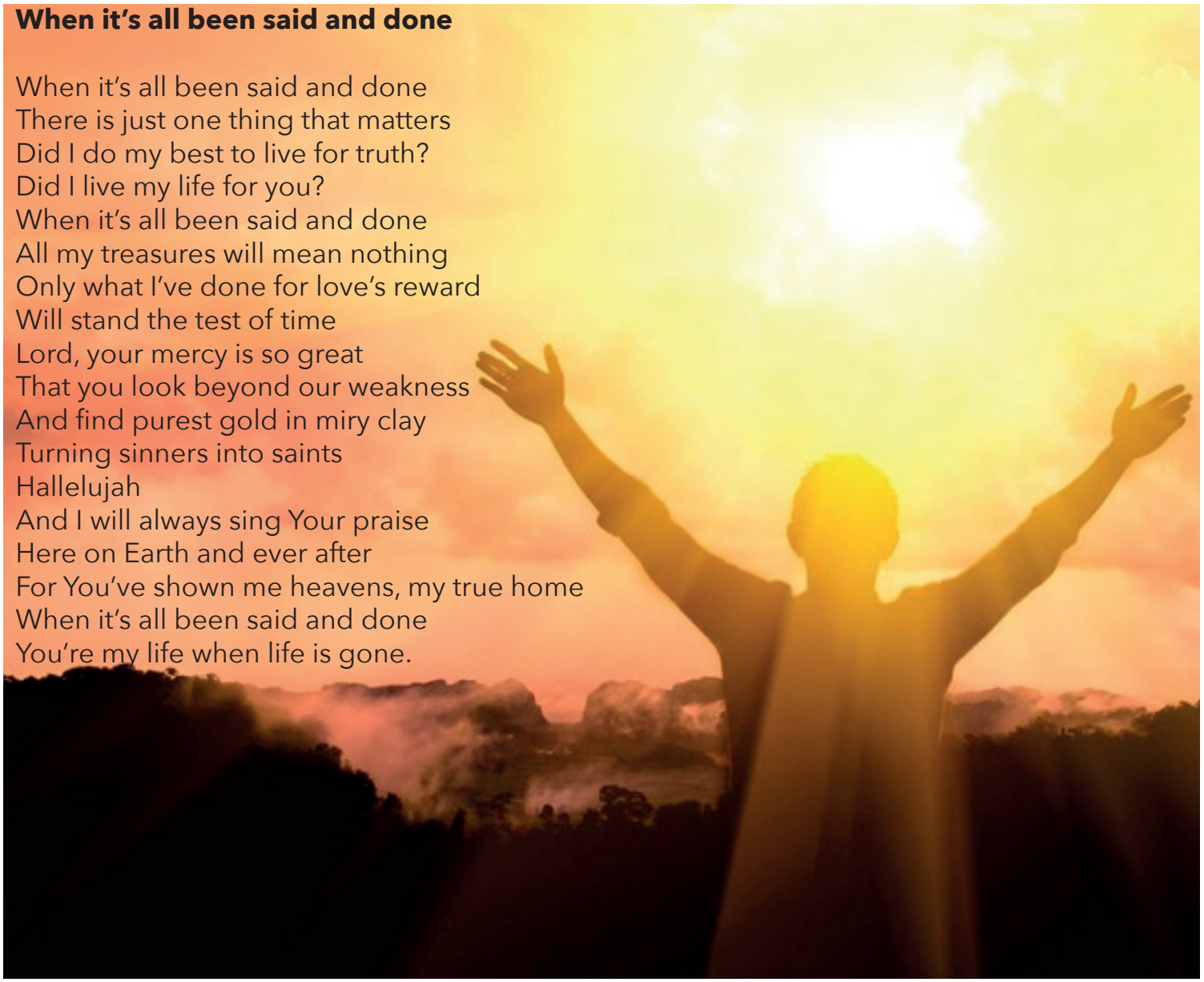
During the Service, Peter shared that Ken had mentioned on one of the times he visited him about a visit Ken had made to Horace Banner shortly before Horace's death. Horace said to him, "I don't regret a minute of it, and if I could do it all again, I wouldn't change a thing," Ken told Peter that he felt exactly the same!

Another personal comment received which was reiterated in the service. "One of the brightest lights has left us and thousands of smaller lights are left flickering because of him and his faith. Loved and remembered always."

Ken's friend Mike Huck gave his blessing to playing the following song.

When it's all been said and done

When it's all been said and done
There is just one thing that matters
Did I do my best to live for truth?
Did I live my life for you?
When it's all been said and done
All my treasures will mean nothing
Only what I've done for love's reward
Will stand the test of time
Lord, your mercy is so great
That you look beyond our weakness
And find purest gold in miry clay
Turning sinners into saints
Hallelujah
And I will always sing Your praise
Here on Earth and ever after
For You've shown me heavens, my true home
When it's all been said and done
You're my life when life is gone.



The family would like to thank Peter, Ray Peers and Colin Pownall, for their prayers, love and support. Thank you to those who attended the service for your cards, Gifts and kind donations to the work in Romania.

Thank you & God bless

Church Focus – Roe Green



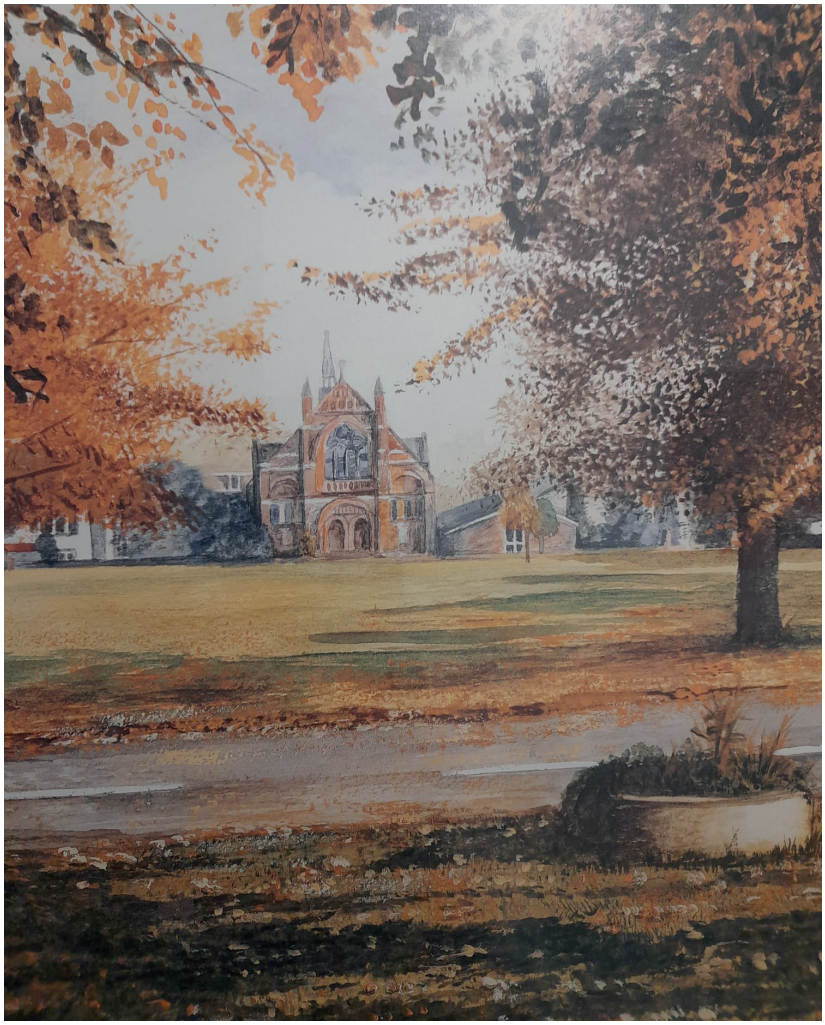
Located between the A580 (East Lancashire Road) and the M60, to the west of the Manchester/Salford conurbation, Roe Green is nowadays a much sought-after residential area. However, it was not always so. Descriptions of the Roe Green area in the early 1800s mention 'an uncouth, working-class place', where on one occasion a meeting was disrupted by someone climbing onto the house roof and putting a slate over the chimney, literally smoking the fellowship out!

The first service at Roe Green seems to have taken place in the open air around 1808, led by preachers from the then Independent Methodist church in Manchester. A large stone, which the preachers stood on to raise themselves above the crowd, is now preserved in the church grounds. Indoor services later took place in the house of Samuel Clarke, and in due course his son Richard provided a preaching room in the building. Although this room was later enlarged, it proved inadequate for the growing congregation and in 1855 a purpose-built chapel was opened.





Within a few years, this also proved to be too small and was replaced by the present building, opened on the same site in 1884. In the meantime, a Sunday School had been opened behind the chapel: this was replaced in the early 20th century by a larger building, but a combination of falling numbers and general deterioration saw its closure and demolition in the 1970s. The land was sold and a new church hall was built alongside the chapel. Two centuries after that first service, there is a strong relationship between the fellowship and the local community.



A couple of years ago, a few improvements were made to the appearance of the building. The railings, which had been put up to combat vandalism, were removed and the front doors were repainted purple. Some of the young mothers in the village, who were impressed by what had been done, then resulted in a bench being moved from just in front of the hall to the front of the lawn, giving a better view of the green which gives the village its name.

Where the bench once stood is a box containing books that passers-by are free to borrow. Inside the hall, murals have been painted by Kirsty Jones, an artist from Hindley. While Kirsty was at work, she put up a sign saying 'artwork in progress', and over twenty people came in to see what was happening, leading to some useful conversations about the Lord.





The formal re-opening of the church hall coincided with the Harvest collection, and several people came in on the Saturday to leave bags full of shopping that would be given to a local foodbank.
As well as the Sunday morning service at 10.30, there is a coffee morning each Monday,









a Toddler group on Tuesdays and Bible studies in various homes. Several community groups regularly use the church hall. The fellowship has a strong emphasis on prayer, and undertakes regular prayer walks around the green.

Church News



Harvest Thanksgiving at Bryn

We always celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving towards the end of September, but this year was different as we made a weekend of it!

On the Saturday evening we held a church family get-together which began with a tasty meal of hot-pot. After that, the fun and games really began. The Sunday School children were super-excited (and so were one or two adults) as we got into our Harvest-themed games and quizzes. The younger men entertained us with well-delivered songs and poems, and we were so grateful for the small group of young women who expertly plan and present these occasions which make a real difference to our church life.



On Sunday morning we met again, in a quieter and more reflective mood, to praise God for His wonderful provision for us. We focused on Psalm 65 and were drawn into joyful praise for our God who is both faithful and generous. We were also reminded that, as God's children, we should be like Him - giving freely of our resources and of ourselves. We thank God for the blessing of this year's harvest and the celebration of it, and pray that the practical outworking of our gratitude may bring blessing to others too.

-Brenda Dykes













God changes lives

Members of Mount Zion Independent Methodist Church, Cliviger took non-Christian friends to the God Loves You Tour event to enjoy an evening of Christian music and to hear Franklin Graham speak the Gospel to more than 10,000 people on October 3 at the Co-op Live, Etihad Campus, Manchester. Along with four local churches we booked three coaches to take people to the meeting," said Ann Jane Laemmer, one of the leaders at Mount Zion. "It was a wonderful evening and Franklin's message was followed by hundreds of people going forward to accept Christ, including some from our party. We distributed 1,700 leaflets publicising the night to homes around our churches and a banner, with details of the event, was placed on a key-road near our church." The Rev Franklin Graham, son of the great evangelist Billy Graham, has devoted his life to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and meeting the needs of suffering people around the world. President and chief executive officer of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, his first evangelistic event with the ministry was held in 1989, and since then, he recently shared the hope of Christ in London, Birmingham, Glasgow; Addis Ababa, Can Tho in Vietnam; Vientiane in Laos; Krakow in Poland and in ten cities along the U.S.-Mexico border. During his previous outreaches in London, Birmingham, and Glasgow, thousands of people responded to the message of God's love.



Well, well – fresh water

Villagers in a remote Indian village will soon have clean, fresh, water thanks to members and friends of Mount Zion Church, Cliviger. Youngsters attending the Sunday Club each made small tubes given to adults after a service to be used as money boxes to raise cash for the well. These were distributed before the Harvest Festival service when a larger 'well' was built on the stage and during the service the 'mini-wells' were poured into the large well, surrounded by cans of food to be given to the needy in the Cliviger area, and flowers, to be presented to elderly residents in the parish.

"We raised more than £1,000 for the well within a few days of the service and more was added to mean we could afford to pay for the digging of the well," said Alan Scholes who led the harvest service. Peter Foulds, who owns a furniture business, and made the arrangements for the drilling with a friend in India said: "Orphan Hope has so far drilled 67 wells in India which means that for the first time villagers can collect clean water for use in their homes." Peter was preaching at the church the Sunday following the harvest service.





More than a "Random Act of Kindness"

At our Church Meeting in July, one of our members related a story to us. Whilst out walking her dog, she was approached by a young man, and he offered her a small bag. He did not explain; he just said it was a small present. When she got home, she opened the bag and found it was an offer from a Betting Office for a free bet! This got her thinking, and she suggested we try something similar in our village as an outreach.

Some years ago we tried buying some bacon sandwiches and giving them out on the main street, but the footfall was very low, and we were struggling to give them away. However, we thought it was a good idea, so we decided to try another method of giving out a message about our Church and God's Love.

We contacted a small café on the main road with the idea of basing ourselves in the entrance with a sign and a table and paying for a customer's sandwich. The owner, Brenda, said she was happy with this, and they would then point the customer in our direction for us to explain what we were doing. We also decided we would give them a further gift in the shape of a mug, with a text on it and our details, along with a tea bag, coffee sachet, milk sachet and a chocolate biscuit so they could have a cup of tea on us as well.

It was also agreed that we would produce a small flyer to go in the cup with our Service details, and times, plus an explanation for this gift.

This read:

"A Small Gift, A Great Love. We hope this brightens your day! This small act of kindness comes to you with no strings attached. Why? Because Jesus loves you, and we love our community. You are seen, you matter, and you are not alone.

"We love because He first loved us." – 1 John 4:19

Brought to you with joy by Silksworth IM Church

We are a local family of faith dedicated to loving God and serving our village. No matter where you are on your journey, you are always welcome here."

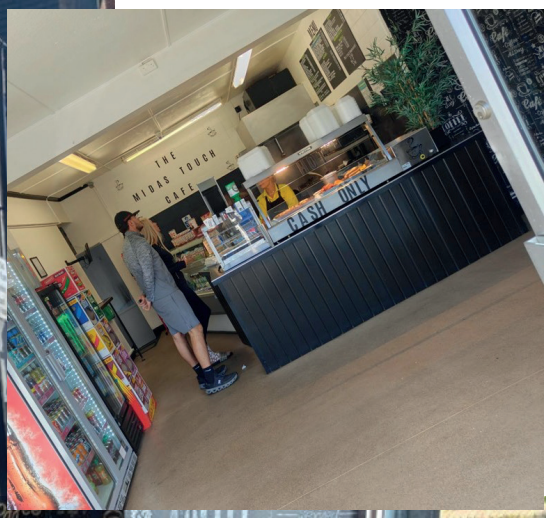
All the giveaways were purchased, and the small brightly coloured bags were filled, ready for the event (50 in total).

On Saturday 3rd October, 12 members gathered in Church to pray for the morning. Then the first three went into the café for a 9:30 am start. We decided that, given the size of the shop, we would limit our numbers on a rota to three at a time. The rest stayed in the church to pray and be available in case anyone wanted to talk to someone.

It proved to be a great success and by 2:00 pm when the café was closing we gave away our final bag; all 50 had gone, and we had paid for 55 sandwiches. Brenda and Sharon, who were working that morning, said they were "Blown


June talking to Colin Hogg's Granddaughter



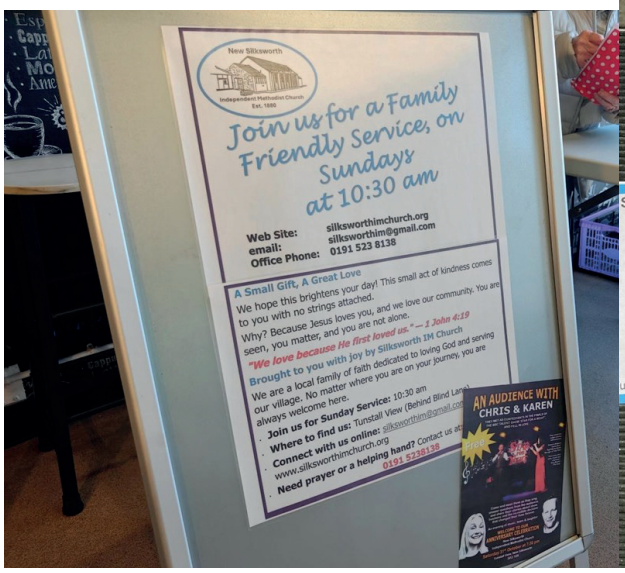


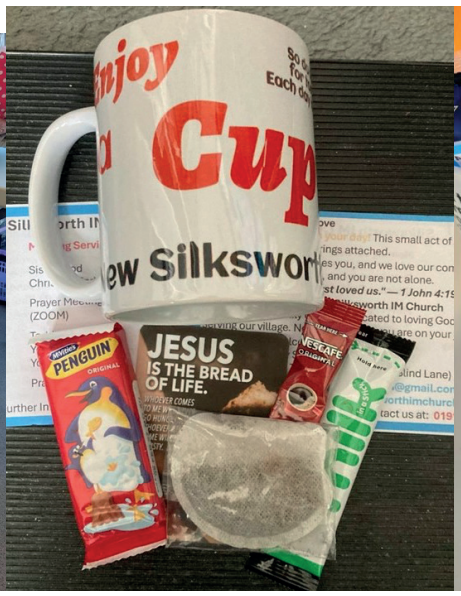


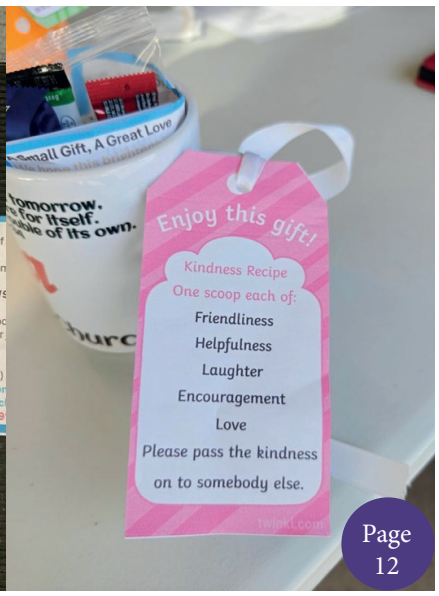
Away" by how the customers had responded to the whole event. We were able to enjoy a number of very interesting conversations with people who had at some time in their lives attended our Sunday School or Youth Clubs, and the invitation was made for them to come and visit us again at any of our Services. June Oliver, our eldest member (97), had a great time telling people about their relatives who used to attend because of her phenomenal memory for names and faces. All the other members said that, although apprehensive about how this whole event would be received, they enjoyed sharing with people the reason why we were there and the love of God, which led us to tell others about it.

There were no specific decisions to attend or know more, but we were so grateful that we had been able to plant the seeds. We await God's watering and maybe a harvest in His time.

- Phil Oliver **(New Silksworth)**







Christians Lay Churches

The Christian Lay Churches at 150

Shaun Newton, our General Secretary, is writing a definitive history of the Christian Lay Churches, to mark the 150th Anniversary of their formation The work will deal with their eventual union with the United Free Gospel Churches in 1895 and then the standardised name of Independent Methodists in 1898. The North East Circuit is planning events from February 2027 to March 2028, and Shaun has prepared a series of articles summarising the history, to tie in with the commemorations.

Part 1: Sunderland in the 1870s: The Road to Separation

In February 1877 between two and three hundred Sunderland Primitive Methodists left to form the Christian Lay Churches. This 150th-anniversary series begins with the two years of argument that led to the break.

An older story

Lay-led Methodism was not new to the North East. Independent Methodist societies appeared in Durham and Northumberland from 1819, including one in Sunderland at Numbers' Garth. Historians long assumed they had faded by about 1830, but a printed preaching plan of 1876 shows a small Durham district of the United Free Gospel Churches, as the Independent Methodists then called themselves, still preaching from Wrekenton to Shildon. It was shrinking fast, and nothing yet links it to the Sunderland seceders. Yet as one lay-led tradition was fading, another was about to begin.

A confident Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism had come to Sunderland in the early 1820s, and its first chapel, in Flag Lane in the old East End, was built in 1824. By the 1870s it was Sunderland's largest Methodist body, and it ran on its members: local preachers, Sunday school teachers and officials who kept the chapels going. The Christian Lay Churches would inherit that tradition, not invent it.

Its ambition showed in a new central chapel. After a search that rejected Vine Place (the women organising the bazaar thought it not central enough), land in Tatham Street was bought in 1872 for £1,850. The chapel opened in August 1875. Not everyone approved. "Talk about a new chapel! better get the old one filled," one local preacher wrote to the Sunderland Times in 1873. Yet J. F. Drinkwater and Myers Wayman, future leaders of the separation, were among its substantial supporters. The trouble came not from the chapel, but from what was proposed for the Circuit around it.

1875: dividing the Circuit

In 1875 it was proposed to divide the Sunderland Circuit, with a second Circuit centred on Tatham Street. There were practical arguments for it, but division would also redistribute ministers, money and influence, and the old Circuit was in debt. The Quarterly Meeting, the Circuit's own governing body, said no in March 1875, and kept saying no.

The votes at a glance

Date	Meeting	Against division	For division
March 1875	Quarterly Meeting	69	19
December 1875	Quarterly Meeting	38	34
January 1876	Circuit officials meeting the General Committee's delegation	62 of about 90	About 26
4 December 1876	Quarterly Meeting	46	21

Opinion moved, so there was no fixed party waiting to break away. But at every vote, the local meeting rejected division.

January 1876: the local voice overruled

The question went to the Primitive Methodist General Committee. In January 1876 its delegation met about ninety Circuit officials in Sunderland, who opposed division by sixty-two to about twenty-six. Within days, on 15 January, the Echo reported that the Committee had decided to divide the Circuit anyway. Its own rules restricted dividing a Circuit that was in debt and whose Quarterly Meeting objected. The historian Geoffrey Milburn later called the decision "strange, and indeed unconstitutional". The argument was now about who had the right to decide.

It spilled into the Sunderland Daily Echo. Edward Rutter, a future leader of the separation, wrote that it was "high time the laymen of the Primitive Methodist Connexion were astir and looked about for help somewhere else". A writer signing himself "Nom de Plume" called division "a ministerial scheme" and warned that "the ultimate issue of division is to reduce lay preaching to a nonentity". In February, Drinkwater and Myers Wayman were associated with a resolution warning of an "exodus" if division went ahead. A year before it happened, leaving had become thinkable.

The end of 1876

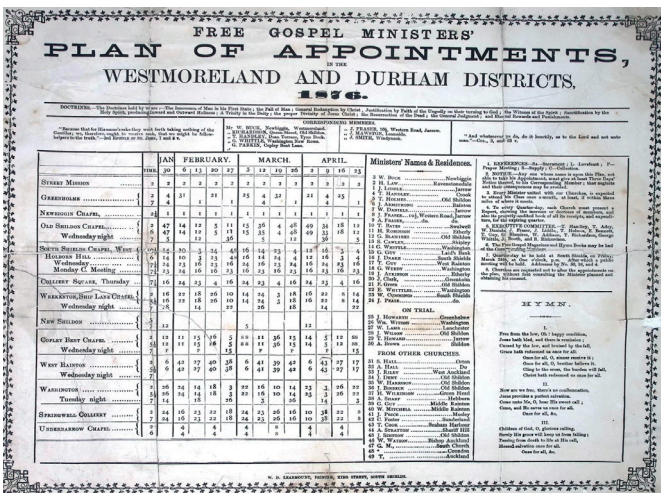
The dispute went on to the District Meeting and then to the 1876 Conference at Newcastle, which handed it to a special committee. Meanwhile the Circuit carried on its work: this was a church in dispute, not in collapse. In December 1876 the Quarterly Meeting rejected division once more, by 46 votes to 21.

There was still no Christian Lay Church and no plan for one, but a substantial body of Sunderland Primitive Methodists believed they could not carry on as normal if division were forced on them. The argument had begun over how to organise a Circuit. It ended by asking who had the authority to divide it.

In February 1877 the Conference committee, fourteen people of whom only two were laymen, arrived to settle the matter. Part 2 tells what happened next.



The chapel at the centre of the dispute: Tatham Street, opened August 1875, looking south. On the left is Bethesda Free Church.

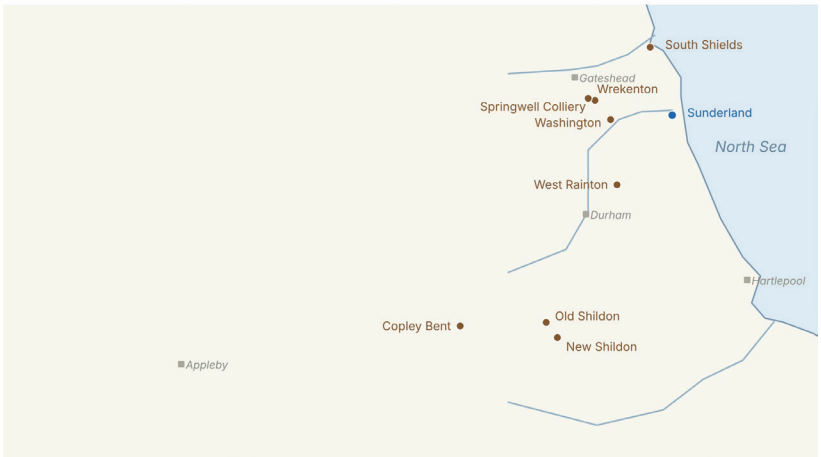


FREE GOSPEL MINISTERS'
PLAN OF APPOINTMENTS,
IN THE
WESTMORELAND AND DURHAM DISTRICTS,
1876.

An older lay-led tradition: the Free Gospel Ministers' plan for the Westmorland and Durham districts, 1876.

Before 1877

Sunderland, and the preaching places on the 1876 Westmorland and Durham Free Gospel plan (brown)



Sunderland, and the preaching places on the 1876 Westmorland and Durham plan.

FUNERAL RIGHTS & OBLIGATIONS



I know that this title won't grab your attention but if you could bear with me for a few minutes and read on, you will see why this is such an important subject. Many of you will be involved in the funeral ministry and your views and experiences would be appreciated.
Dorothy Kendrick and I, on behalf of the Ministry Committee, recently attended an online meeting, organised by the Law Commission and Churches Together in England on their current project 'Rights and Obligations relating to Funerary Methods, Funerals and Remains'. The Law Commission are consulting with various different groups before publishing a consultation paper in Spring 2027. Following this, recommendations may need to be made to parliament on changes to the current law which is outdated, complex and confusing, often leading to conflict and disputes, particularly between families. Those of us who are involved with funerals will know this only too well.
The meeting was attended by about twelve people and churches represented were Baptist, Methodist, Salvation Army, Quakers, Churches in Communities (CIC International), Moravian Church, Arminian Church and the Independent Methodists. The one-hour meeting ran out of time to discuss all relevant questions so they are asking for feedback via email on experiences and ideas. We felt our Connexional voice needs to be heard and so discussed this at our last Enabling Group as to how we consult with churches; hence this article.
Questions being raised are:
Should a person's wishes about their funeral arrangements be made binding in law? Currently, funeral wishes left in a will or letter are not legally binding. How would this be recorded? What exceptions might there be (eg if wishes are impossible to carry out, too costly or in breach of public decency)?
Who should make decisions about your body after you die, including funeral arrangements and disposal? If there is a will, named executors hold ultimate power to make decisions, and although expected to act reasonably, there is no obligation to consult with next of kin or family. Where there is no will, this falls to a complicated hierarchy.
The above can often lead to disputes. How can these be resolved?
Could/should a 'funeral arranger' be nominated in a will or letter (similar to nominating an executor)?
Who is the funeral for, the deceased or those attending? This question raised a lot of discussion with most saying it was primarily for those attending. We did not necessarily fully agree with this, feeling that a person's wishes should, as far as possible, be catered for and carried out.
If anyone has any thoughts, ideas, concerns or experiences you would like to share so that we can give feedback to the Law Commission, please email Pauline at education@imchurches.org.uk or send by post to the Resource Centre, Fleet Street, Pemberton, Wigan WN5 0DS.
Pauline Smith, Education Organiser.



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