



West Devon
Methodist Circuit

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2025

"I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 89 v 1

Congratulations!



This year has seen the Rev Irving Penberthy mark the incredible milestone of seventy years in ordained ministry. We had a lovely chat at his home, aptly named "Eisteddfa" – Welsh for "a place to sit."

Born in Cornwall, his parents went to the Wesley Chapel in Camborne and then moved to the nearby village of Beacon where Irving grew up.

Although always having a belief in God, it wasn't until he was doing National Service at the radar station at Kingsbridge that he was challenged by the call to personal commitment.

"I tried to go to Sunday worship every week, I was reading the New Testament and had been feeling uneasy about it. I'd never given my life to Christ."

So, one night shift at the radar station young Irving knelt by the toolbox and prayed, committing his life to Christ. "I stood up and knew something had happened. I told the local minister, Rev. Moody, and he insisted I go with him to Hope Cove Chapel the next Sunday and give my testimony."

It wasn't long after that when a trainee minister, Tony Daw at Salcombe looked him in the eye and said, "You must be a minister." The call persisted and Irving completed the Local Preacher's correspondence course in a year. He went on to train for the ministry and was ordained in 1955, marrying



Irving Penberthy, aged 22

his soul mate, Audrey, in 1956 and honeymooning at Cliff College during the August celebration. "People made a bit of a fuss of us when they found out" chuckled Irving. And so, we get back to Wales, the principality which stole his heart and comprised the bulk of his ordained ministry. Beginning in Aberdare, then Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil, his chapels around Merthyr included Aberfan and Irving was there when the terrible disaster happened on October 21st, 1966.

A colliery spoil heap collapsed and engulfed the school and a row of houses. 116 children and 28 adults died. It is hard

to take in the enormity of such a tragedy. In an interview with Wales Online for the fiftieth anniversary, he described seeing emergency vehicles on the road and a strong feeling telling him to turn back toward Aberfan. He stayed with the relatives waiting for news of their loved ones and accompanied fathers to the morgue which was set up in a chapel to identify their children.

Irving's eyes fill up at the memory fifty-nine years later. It was a massive tragedy to come to terms with, did it shake his faith?

"Oh no, it strengthened it." Really? How?

"We were strangely supported through all the recovery. We lost a third of our Sunday School. All the churches worked together, the Baptist Minister lost a son. I never blamed God, the enquiry found that people had made bad decisions at the colliery. The Coal Board ignored local knowledge about a spring which meant the spoil heap was not stable, add to that the torrential rain. God was not to blame; he held us up."

Whilst the disaster was a defining moment in Irving's ministry, another is a decades long love of children's ministry. It was on a bus in Cardiff in the late 1950s that the idea of Billy Blackbird flew into his mind.

"We had family services once a month, they aren't really my stories, I feel that they are 'given' to me. They are forest parables."

There are now 140 Billy Blackbird stories on a hard drive. Many people of all ages have loved them and learned from them over many years. Billy travelled with Irving from Wales to Sussex, Shropshire and down to Devon. Children from Bryn Offa School in Shropshire compiled a beautifully illustrated book of Billy Blackbird stories they had written as a retirement present. It is a prized possession nearly thirty years later.

Still leading worship at the sprightly age of 94, what keeps things fresh?

"I read my Bible, pray and I also enjoy listening to the Daily Service on the radio."

"My Great Granny Ellis lived to be 100, so maybe I can keep going. I remember though, a quote from John Wesley which I heartily subscribe to, 'Lord, may I not live to be useless.'"



With a big smile, we part ways and will meet just a few hours later at the Local Preacher's meeting where Rev Irving is a much appreciated and active participant. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do in service of the Gospel of Christ.



The theme for the Summer Holiday Club this year was Ohana, which is Hawaiian for "Family." There were plenty of flowers and some grass skirts about as the clubs toured around Winkleigh, Hatherleigh, Petrockstowe and Madworthy chapels. There were lots of fun activities, baking being particularly popular. The children explored the idea of what we have 'in our hands' to share with others like Peter in Acts 3. They came up with plenty of ideas including kindness, friendship, time and joy. The feedback from parents was very encouraging. "The boys had a wonderful time." "The kids loved it!" and many more similar comments. Holiday clubs are an important part of the Circuit's ministry to the community, touching families from all church backgrounds and none. Thank you to Sarah and all the volunteers who work together to make this such a success. Happy faces, life lessons and lots of laughter along the way.





Stay and Play Café is next at Fairplace on **Tuesday 28th October** at **11.00am**. Parents/carers, bring your children for a day of fun and food. A warming plate of loaded beans on toast with cupcakes for pudding. The atmosphere is always buzzing with joy and it doesn't depend on the weather!

"Let's face it, a nice creamy chocolate cake does a lot for a lot of people, it does for me." Audrey Hepburn



Busy Bees continues to reach new people and it's fantastic to see friendships grow. Autumn sessions are **18th Sept, 2nd Oct, 16th Oct, 6th Nov and 20th Nov. 9.30 – 11.30am.**

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.” John F. Kennedy



Forest Church

12th October and 9th November

It's getting close to a year of Forest Church, and it has settled to a popular part of the rhythm of Circuit worship life. It is evolving into a lovely ecumenical event. Rather than the somewhat static nature of a traditional service, Forest Church has us exploring the landscape in a more mindful way. Noticing the intricacy and beauty of creation, we find the sacred in what is around us. Jesus used the natural world as examples of God's love in action and today we can still respond in wonder. "How great Thou art!"

WINKLEIGH METHODIST CHURCH

Invites you to an



Harvest Celebration Lunch

**SUNDAY 5TH
OCTOBER
1PM
WINKLEIGH
VILLAGE HALL**

*All profits to be
donated to Devon Air
Ambulance & Farming
Community Network*

*Cold meats & a
variety of salads
Vegetarian options
Desserts
Tea, Coffee*

**Ticketed event
only
£12.50 (Adults
& over 11's)
£3.00
(Up to 11)**

***Tickets available NOW from Jane Hill 01837 680128
and Fiona Marshall 01837 83382***

Hatherleigh Flower Festival

From the 23rd to 26th August Hatherleigh Church was ablaze with colour from eleven displays on the theme “Born in Song”. Each display was centred on a hymn or song and conveyed the meaning through floral art. There was a lot of skill and talent evident in the displays which took the viewer on a journey through the wonder of Creation to Christ’s work of Salvation and on to the Christian’s response in seeking, sacrament and spreading the Gospel message to the world. All the songs represented were sung at the Songs of Praise Service, although not every single verse! It was a joyous occasion, thank you to everyone who took part.



<Born in song by Sandra Trenaman

All things bright and beautiful by Ruth Penberthy >



< Yes, God is good by Sue Tidball



< Love Divine by Brenda East

Think of a world without any flowers by Cindy Squire and Louise Bater>





< He's got the whole world in his hands by The Sunday Club

When I survey the wondrous cross by Sandra Trenaman >



< As the deer pants for the water by Janet Trenaman

I am the bread of life by Lucy Gilbert >



< Shine, Jesus, shine by Lynn Strawbridge



Colours of day by Heather and Eve Smallacombe

Madworthy

The monthly Memory Café is from 10.00 – 12.00 offering practical and emotional support to people living with dementia and carers. It is followed by the Open Community Lunch which is served at 12.30. It is a very welcoming space and it is great to see the friendships blossom.

Autumn dates are 8th October and 12th November.

Please book with Beryl 01409 221389 or Barbara 07974 109505

Creative Faith Autumn dates: 27th September, 25th October and 22nd November. 9.30am – 11.00am.

Sunday 28th September Harvest Festival Brunch Service 11.00am.

Bridestowe

Harvest Festival Service on October 5th at 11.00am. to be led by Mark Shepherd. The service will be followed by a bring and share lunch in the Ark. All welcome.

October Coffee Morning in aid of Farmers Charities on Saturday 11th October 10.00 – 12.00. Coffee, tea and plenty of cakes!

Boasley

Wednesday 24th September Macmillan Coffee Morning 10.30 – 12.30

Thursday 16th October Soup and Sweet 12.00 – 2.00pm

Belstone

The monthly 6.00pm service in the Tea Room is on October 12th led by Rev Chris with Helena Heywood. As autumn brings the colder weather, you can be sure to be very cosy with the log burner lit. If you haven't been before, do come along to this informal service with scrumptious tea and cakes provided by Marion. A very Dartmoor Sunday evening.



A photograph of Belstone Sunday School in 1910 – can you spot what looks like an act of kindness here? If you look carefully, you will see that unusually for the time, one of the teachers is not wearing a hat. Look at the children and it seems that a little girl is wearing a hat a bit too big for her. Could it be that this is Easter Sunday and the teacher lent her hat for the photograph so that the little girl could have an “Easter Bonnet”?

“In your Easter bonnet, with all the frills upon it, you’ll be the grandest lady in the Easter parade” Irving Berlin

Petrockstowe

Macmillan Coffee Morning Friday 26th September 10.00 – 12.00 in the Chapel Schoolroom. We would be very grateful for donations of cakes, savoury treats and raffle prizes. Let us all work together to once again make this event a great success for a worthy cause. If you are able to help on the day, please contact Lise Linney 07946 422321.

Harvest Festival Sunday 12th October 11.00 at Baxter Hall. After the service a two-course lunch at 12.30. Tickets £12.50 / £6 per child aged up to 11. Book with Ann Luxton 01837 810728 An auction of produce will follow the lunch.

Providence

Sunday 21st September 3.00pm Harvest Service followed by tea.

Monday 22nd 7.00pm Concert by Widecombe Singers followed by Supper and sale of goods.

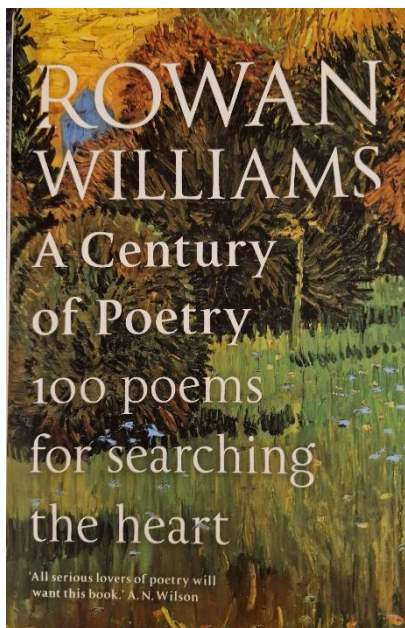
Saturday 27th 5.00pm Cream Tea Concert with Maggy Duffy “Devon Historical and Hysterical” Tickets £10 book with Margaret Allin 07436 008842

Saturday 11th October 12.00 – 6.00pm Exhibition of Dartmoor Photographs by Chris Chapman. It's the last exhibition day this year so if you haven't seen these amazing photos yet, come along. Delicious refreshments available throughout.

Congratulations!!

On Friday 12th September Frank Smith celebrated his 100th birthday with around sixty people at a party jointly organised by Providence Chapel, Gidleigh Church, Throwleigh Church and Throwleigh Village Hall. Lots of food, and entertainment provided by Jim Causley and Bill Murray. Frank, who was in the Navy, kept up his love of the water through sailing. The cake bears the name of his favourite yacht! Frank keeps busy and is responsible for unlocking the chapel before services and giving a friendly welcome to all. Happy Birthday from us all.





Book Review

.if you enjoy poetry, you will love this. If you haven't read much poetry since you left school, I still commend this to you. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has put together an eclectic collection of works. Some authors are familiar, others obscure. He gives a commentary on each one which draws the reader into deeper contemplation. As Frances Ward, poetry editor of Theology magazine says:

"Each poem in this collection is a door ajar, which Rowan Williams nudges open, inviting us in, where he carefully shows us around. He leaves us in a room of many windows, the light streaming in, our souls enriched, this book in our hand."

A beautiful book and a great present.

Dissenting Voices

The last of the six Heritage Exhibitions was held at Northlew on 30th August, and what an amazing six months it has been! Beginning at Exbourne in March, followed by Chilla, Boasley, Bridestowe and Winkleigh. Each venue telling the story of rural Methodism and the Devonshire offshoot, the Bible Christians, along with stories from each community. Reflecting the lives and faith of the people, these exhibits prompted a lot of interest and inspiration.

Thank you to everyone who dug around in their cupboards and in some cases, lofts, for items of interest. There was so much, it's impossible to list it all. Thank you too, to everyone who provided the refreshments.

We learned of concerned parents at Boasley burning the school down in the 1920s to rid it of diphtheria as an epidemic had been rife amongst the pupils. We learned of the Winkleigh congregation campaigning against slavery in the early 1800s, the itinerant ministry of Rev and Mrs Thomas who held missions in Chilla and Bridestowe in the 1920s, making a significant impact on the lives of those chapels. We also learned of Brian Maddaford's father and uncle as children taking part in a fund-raising article in 1905 to build the church. Then there were the strange links to the Titanic with the loss of three farm workers from the Chilla and Boasley areas, and the near miss with the couple from near Beaworthy who sold their tickets and travelled on a later ship.

Remarkable people like Harry Major, born in Northlew in 1795, who became known as the first Bible Christian theologian. He travelled to Kent and the Channel Islands with William O'Bryan – the founder of the Bible Christians. Harry Major was a significant character in the history of Methodism in this region and beyond.

At Bridestowe we saw tiny hymnbooks from 1838 & 1873, where printed on the front page was the instruction "To be sold by itinerant preachers." Evoking a time recalled by Rev Thomas in his memoirs that due to illiteracy and the lack of hymnbooks, preachers would read two lines at a time with the congregation singing them back. It seems doubtful that a traditional "five hymn sandwich" service could be possible in those circumstances, especially with some of the longer hymns!

Some people could recognise family members or even their younger selves in photographs. Formal occasions and fun ones together illustrating a vibrant community of faith spanning many years.

Along with the past, the exhibitions highlighted the activities of the present and the vision for the future. We saw how our ancestors responded to the needs of their day and so we must do the same in our time.

Kathryn Timms supplied beautiful artwork inspired by local chapels and Rachel Short brought recording equipment to collect memories of chapel life from folk who I am sure had no idea that they held a treasure trove of history in their heads. There was space to remember chapels now closed and there were some wonderful photos. A valuable resource, as Widdon Chapel building, for example, no longer exists.

We have formed an amazing archive and there will be more projects, so watch out for more information. Heritage is not merely about the past, it is about knowing what we are a part of today and being inspired to continue the legacy of our predecessors. Lives transformed by faith in Jesus had a transformational effect on communities.

Each Exhibition Day concluded with a concert by Jim Causley, sometimes with his friend Bill Murray, who brought a wonderful selection of Devonshire songs along with a freshly composed song called "Dissenting Voices", you can hear it on the app 'Sound Cloud' – this is the chorus:

*When dissenting voices sing together as one
There is no discord where the Lord's work is done.
The teaching of Jesus' love we believe,
It unites us together in sweet harmony.*

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you when forget-me-nots have withered.

Carve your name on hearts, not on marble. Charles Spurgeon

Be More Methodist

In the 18th century you could be a little surprised to know that if you admitted you were a Methodist, you would be considered a religious enthusiast, perhaps even a fanatic. People may have looked at you rather worryingly. To admit to being a Methodist was to state the seriousness with which you lived your Christian faith.

Methodism began as a movement rather than a denomination. Essentially you could be a Methodist Anglican or a Methodist Baptist or a Methodist Catholic...it was a label which was used of someone that was completely dedicated to living out their Christianity with every fibre of their body, mind and soul. The term Methodist was originally used as a bit of an insult, but the name stuck and we embraced the idea.

The Wesley brothers with a handful of friends developed their "method" through meeting together in a "Holy Club" to explore the Christian faith, together, to learn hard, to pray hard to encourage each other and to be accountable to each other in their exercise of the Christian faith.

At a time when many thought of Christianity as restricted to liturgical worship on a Sunday, a personal faith to essentially keep to oneself, the Methodist movement posed a threat to the establishment.

The commitment of the Methodist was to Prayer, reading and study of the bible, fasting, regular communion and Holy living. But not just these inner disciplines but the resultant external disciplines of doing good, visiting the sick and prisoners, feeding and clothing people, earning, saving, giving all one can, and opposition to slavery (fight injustice).

To be a Methodist then and still today, means to apply ourselves to these internal and external disciplines...not as options, but as essential requirements of our faith in Jesus.

You may hear me speak about Being More Methodist in the coming year. This is not a statement regarding our denomination, but a call to intentionally engage with a deeper commitment to take seriously what Wesley would call "the Means of Grace" and "the works of mercy".

At a time of such uncertainty and anger in our world, as Christians, I urge us all to return to those core aspects of what it means to be followers of the Jesus "Way" ...and I invite you all to sign up!

Many Blessings from Rev Chris

Harvest Celebrations

21st September

**Bridestowe 9.30
United Service at C of E**

Exbourne 11.00

United Service at C of E

Hatherleigh 11.00

Providence 3.00

22nd September Providence Concert 7.00

Followed by supper and sale of goods.

28th September

Madworthy 11.00

Brunch Service

5th October

Bridestowe 11.00

United Service

Winkleigh Community Harvest Lunch

12th October

Northlew 2.30

Iddesleigh 10.00

United Service at C of E

Petrockstowe at Baxter Hall 11.00

Winkleigh 11.00

17th October

Iddesleigh 7.00

19th October

Chilla 2.30

26th October

Boasley 2.30

Editor's note

It was a joy to lead the Songs of Praise at Hatherleigh's Flower Festival this year. It combined two loves of mine and many other people too - nature and music.

The skill and dedication of those who took part was wonderful, it took many hours of work to produce beautiful displays, I hope you have enjoyed the photos – I couldn't leave any out as they were all so good.

Art in all its forms has been used as expressions of spirituality for thousands of years and now in the age of Artificial Intelligence, I would suggest it is more important than ever. God has created us all unique individuals, with varying gifts for creativity. I recently came across a recording of the Psalms in the style of the blues. I admit I was in awe and loved it, to the point of trying to find out who was behind it and what permissions were required to play it in public worship. Then came the shock, it was produced by AI, the emotional bluesy rendition was from a computer, not a person. Now I know that a human needs to programme the computer, but somehow it felt like cheating.

When we express ourselves through the colours of flower arranging, drawing, painting or writing at Creative Faith, singing, craft or anything else, including 'Billy Blackbird' stories, we are offering something of our humanity to the God who made us human. There is an intrinsic beauty, beauty in imperfection because it is genuine.

I asked Angela Banfield's opinion of the Blues Psalm and after an initial response like mine, she commented that it sounded a bit "too perfect" for a blues voice. And that is the point, the genre of blues music needs imperfections to be truly authentic. It's born out of hardship, the human condition and there is a raw quality to a good blues singer. A computer programme can never get that quite right.

In our Harvest Services, we will be offering imperfect fruit and vegetables as the produce of the land. Each one unique and valued, just as we are. This year the heatwave and the rain may have played havoc with the growing season but still we bring what we have. In our lives there may have been adverse growing conditions but still we come, just as we are and we have the assurance of knowing that God delights in the reality of imperfect worship rather than anything AI can produce. As the harvest hymn says:

*"Accept the gifts we offer, for all Thy love imparts,
But what Thou most desirest, our humble, thankful hearts."*

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