



NEWSLETTER

September 2026



The world is a mess because human beings have turned away from God, breaking a good creation. As Christians we view this brokenness as a temporary reality. The Bible tells us that God has an overarching Plan to rescue and change the world. When God promises a “new thing” this is no small or selfish upgrade like a job promotion or a quick fix to our daily problems. This is a grand promise about the ultimate **new community** that God is building through Jesus Christ. This involves leaving the past behind – old lives being changed into “new creations” in Christ. The “rivers in the desert” came alive when Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to anyone who is spiritually thirsty. God creates something fresh, beautiful and purposeful out of our spiritual deserts.

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LOOKING UNTO JESUS

Hebrews 12:2 (KJV)

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”



On holiday last year, I found myself captivated by a beautiful field of Sunflowers. Every morning and every evening, as I passed by, I noticed something fascinating. At different times of the day, the Sunflowers were facing different directions. Their heads seemed to move in harmony with the sun. It is said that, through a process called floral heliotropism, young Sunflowers naturally follow the sun's movement across the sky.

Deep within the plant, tiny motor cells help the flower turn towards the light. Wherever the sun goes, the Sunflower follows.

Since it was nearing the end of the season, not every day was bright and sunny. Some days, the skies were heavy with clouds and darkness. On those gloomy days, the Sunflowers no longer stood tall and vibrant. Their heads drooped downward and they seemed to lose their cheerful beauty.

As I reflected on this, I realised how much we are like those Sunflowers. When life is going well, when blessings are flowing, prayers are being answered, and the sunshine of God's favour is shining upon us, it is easy to look to God with joy.

We sing confidently, testify boldly about His goodness, and speak triumphantly about our faith. In the bright seasons of life, worship comes naturally. However, life is not always filled with sunshine. There are days when dark clouds gather unexpectedly. Days of disappointment when our plans fall apart. Days of bereavement when grief overwhelms us. Days of broken relationships, financial struggles, loneliness, anxiety, and poor physical and mental health. There are moments when life becomes heavy, and like the Sunflowers on dark and cloudy days, our heads begin to bow down in discouragement.

Sometimes in those dark moments, it can feel as though God is distant or silent. We may wonder why our prayers seem unanswered. We may ask ourselves, “Lord, where are You?”

Yet even when the skies are cloudy, the sun has not disappeared. It is still there, hidden beyond the darkness.

In the same way, even when we cannot clearly see God at work, He is still present. He has not abandoned us.

That is why the writer of Hebrews encourages us to keep “looking unto Jesus” Why? Because Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith. He began His work in us, and He is faithful to complete it. Jesus Himself understands suffering, sorrow, rejection and pain. Hebrews reminds us that He endured the cross, despising the shame, because He could see the joy set before Him. Even on the darkest day at Calvary, God was still working out a greater purpose.

Friends, our dark seasons are not the end of life’s story. Our cloudy days will not last forever. There may be weeping now, but joy is coming. As the Psalmist declares in Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

The challenge before us is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, even when the skies are grey. Faith is not only praising God in the sunshine; faith is trusting Him in the storm. Faith is choosing to worship Him when life hurts. Faith is believing that God is still good even when circumstances are difficult. Sometimes, the greatest act of faith we can make is simply refusing to give up. Perhaps now, some of us feel like those bowed Sunflowers. Maybe the storms of life have drained our strength and dimmed our joy. If so, let us hear this encouragement together: let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. The clouds will pass.

The darkness will not remain forever. God is still leading us, still strengthening us, and still holding us in His loving hands. And just as the Sunflower turns again toward the sun when the light returns, may we also continue turning our hearts toward Christ each day. Amen.

Lou Ashford

CONSIDER IT JOY WHEN TROUBLES COME

One of the poignant songs written by Graham Kendrick is based on words from the letter of James.

“Consider it joy, pure joy, when troubles come – many trials will make you strong” (James 1:2-4)

Glenys Baker shares some extracts and thoughts from David Jeremiah’s book ‘Captured by Grace’¹ on this theme.



There is a big question: ‘Why does God allow suffering?’ The apostle Paul had a supernatural experience. In a vision he was raised to heaven to hear of glories of which no man had ever told [2 Corinthians 12:2-4] That experience would tend to breed pride which would have ruined his Jesus ministry. So, God allows a “thorn” in Paul’s flesh, a suffering.

“So, trials are allowed by God to help us keep perspective and to enable us to grow spiritually..... The greater the Lord’s plans for us, the more we generally need to be tried. The more critical an army’s mission, the harder the army needs to be drilled. The more significant the lesson you’re teaching your children, the more discipline you’ll need to employ..... Sometimes His earthen vessel simply needs to be heat-treated.”



“Question: Is there any such thing as ‘unanswered prayer’? Or would it be wiser to call them ‘unwanted answers’?.....

Yes, there are times when God doesn’t give us what we want. But, in those cases, He speaks to us in ways just as valuable as the things we prayed for. The question is whether we are listening...

It’s as if God is saying to us, ‘I will not take away the trial, but I will give you the power to endure it.’ Here’s another way of putting it: ‘I won’t give you what you want, but I’ll give you what you need. If I took away the trial, you would grow no stronger – in fact you would just be a little weaker and more helpless, like a pampered child.’

It’s a bit like a child starting school, in tears, fearful. But, if they didn’t go through it, they would never learn how to adjust to a new environment.

¹ ‘Captured by Grace’: David Jeremiah, Thomas Nelson 2026

It's a good exercise to try writing down the good things that happen to us, especially during the difficult times. The danger is that these are things that we don't even notice when times are tough.

“Consider these gifts of grace for which we rarely take time to be grateful (and sadly may not even notice):

- **If you own just one Bible, you are abundantly blessed. Most people in the world do not.**
- **If you awoke this morning more healthy than ill, you are more blessed than one million people who will not survive the week.**
- **If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of more than five hundred million people around the world.**
- **If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75 per cent of the world.**
- **If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and spare change in a dish somewhere, you are among the top 8 per cent of the world's wealthy.**
- **If you prayed yesterday and today, you are in the minority because you believe in God's willingness to hear and answer prayer.**
- **If you have the ability to choose between churches where you may freely worship, you have a blessing many people in this world do not.**
- **If you are a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, you live with daily assurance that you will have eternal life, and that your Saviour has gone to prepare a mansion for you in glory. Millions of people believe this sad life is all there is.”**

It was Johnson Oatman Jr., a local preacher from the small-time town of Lumbarton, New Jersey (USA) who became one of the most popular gospel hymn writers in the 19th century and who wrote:

“When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.”

Glenys Baker

Extracts in bold print are taken from ‘Captured by Grace’ by David Jeremiah (pictured). Copyright © 2006 by David Jeremiah. Used by permission of HarperCollins Christian Publishing. <https://www.harpercollinschristian.com/>

THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD WAS EXPERIENCED



On Saturday 6th June 2026 we held another Christian Healing Ministry morning at The Orchard Room, Sundeley Hill Farm, Brinkworth. It was a wonderful time of fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Between 25 and 30 people attended, roughly half from Freedom Church Wiltshire, and the rest from a number of different local churches. One couple turned up because they saw it advertised on a Brinkworth Facebook group!

We began the morning with a time of worship (this helps us turn our attention to the Lord) and this was followed by two recent testimonies of God's help and healing (this helps increase faith that what the Lord has done for others, He can do for us). During this time of worship and testimony there was an almost tangible sense of the Lord's presence, and one person saw a glorious angel of the Lord in the corner of the room with their wings outstretched over us! A clear sign that the Lord was powerfully present.

This time we had just two teaching sessions so that there was more time for prayer ministry. Both sessions were based on Matthew 10:1-8. I spoke on Foundations in Christ Jesus and focused on verses 7-8: Jesus said "*The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*" Mary Makepeace spoke on Freedom in Christ Jesus - being set free from evil spirits. Mary included some video testimonies from people she knows who have been set free from evil spirits by Jesus Christ. Mary and I also shared about the Christian healing ministries which they are involved with: Healing Rooms England and Wales www.healingrooms.org.uk and Catalyst4Healing www.catalyst4healing.org.

This was followed with more worship and an opportunity to receive prayer for healing. Several people responded for prayer, some of whom experienced the Lord's help and healing. By this time, it was early afternoon, and we finished by sharing lunch together, yet the Lord's healing work continues. We give glory to God for the wonderful time we had, partnering with Him in His healing work in this 21st century. When we meet on Sunday mornings, we are always willing to pray for the Lord's help and healing, so if you would like prayer for the Lord Jesus Christ to touch and transform your life, please come along and ask us to pray for you.

Derek Balsdon

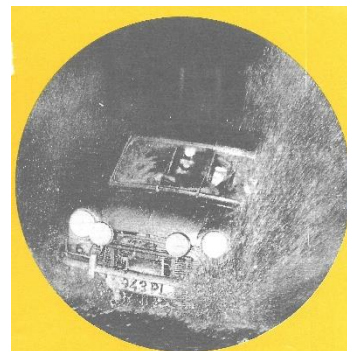
MOTORSPORTS CHAPLAINCY

Elaine Boyd shares a new calling which God has laid on her heart.



Rob and I have had a lifelong interest in Motorsport, Rob, being a very successful amateur rally driver in his youth, and both of us following rallying and Formula 1, whenever possible.

This did get us into a spot of trouble when our daughter, Chloe, was born. She was born on a Saturday and there was a grand prix on the Sunday. We were told by the hospital on Sunday morning that all was well and we could all go home. However, there was a grand prix on at lunchtime! We asked if Chloe could go in the “nursery” unit whilst we watched the grand prix and then we could all go home after the race. The nurse dutifully went off and asked the question. Five minutes later, Matron appeared and lectured us about our new responsibilities as parents and escorted us all off the hospital premises! Needless to say, we didn’t get to see the race and Formula 1 had to take a back seat for a few years.



Over the last few years, I have been seeking God’s direction in my life and a friend mentioned Motorsport chaplaincy to me. At the time, although it interested me, I did not feel it was right to pursue. However, earlier this year, it came to mind and I wondered about whether it was something God might be calling me into. No knowing this, a friend, messaged to tell me about a chaplaincy training day in Gloucester, and I felt that perhaps God was opening the door this time. Various events followed that confirmed this, and I have now completed the training with Sports Chaplaincy UK & Ireland and attended two events.



Sports Chaplaincy UK and Ireland (<https://www.sportschaplaincy.org.uk>) oversees the various sports chaplains who aim to serve those involved in their respective sporting organisations. This is by invitation from the appropriate sporting organisation. The chaplains are there for all who are involved in the sport, “irrespective of position, beliefs or lifestyle”. Their aim is to build relationships and provide pastoral and spiritual care by walking alongside all people, being “pastorally proactive and spiritually reactive”.



There are five key values which Sports Chaplains UK and Ireland expect chaplains to uphold:

- Presence – is all about being there, being a difference – Incarnational: “The word became flesh, dwelling among us.” “Let your light shine”.
- Excellence – in everything we say and do – we serve an excellent God; Servanthood: “not looking to your own interests, but the interests of others.”
- Relationship – is central to all we do; firstly, our relationship with Jesus and then others - expressing compassion and identifying with them: “all things to all people” “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.”
- Confidentiality – being trusted and a safe port of call
- Humility – it’s all about Jesus, not our ego, and at times humbling and at times it can feel humiliating, but this is the walk we have been called to walk

These are quite challenging values, and I would appreciate your prayers for me as I embark upon this new venture – that God would open up opportunities for conversations on race days and that I would quickly find my feet in the role. Also, for safety as I travel to the various race circuits.

Having now attended two races, I have seen God at work in many different ways. Each race day has been very different, and I have been encouraged about how receptive people are to chatting to us, as Chaplains, but also being open to us praying for them. We have also been asked to support in the event of incidents on the track, to support those affected and praying for those who are injured. We are clearly seeing God at work in many different ways, and it is my prayer that we continue to seek His guidance as to how we can best bless this community. Thank you.

Elaine Boyd

ANGEL TESTIMONY



A number of years ago I had to drive at night for a short journey lasting about fifteen minutes. On one occasion, as I was driving, a young man on a motorcycle kept appearing in front of me, then lagging behind. I found this very disconcerting and intimidating and I remember saying out loud: “What are you doing?”

This happened a number of times until, as I was approaching my home, I noticed that I had not turned my lights on! It was then I realised the motorcyclist may have been warning me – he even pointed at me! – I think I was annoying him, for he would not leave me on my own until I realised my error.

I cannot prove the motorcyclist was an angel, but I believe it to have been so. Others, I know, have had similar experiences. His persistence and protection – without a helmet – showed as he kept coming back and forth, pointing at me. And his driving was excellent!

No doubt, if it was an angel, he will not be so keen to take on a similar assignment again? The lesson I learnt that day was not to be so slow in realising my mistakes. I will be forever grateful for His angel’s protection.

“The angel of the LORD encamps all around those
who fear Him and He delivers them.” Psalm 34:7

“For He shall give His angels charge over you.
To keep you in all your ways.” Psalm 91:11

Elizabeth Joy Payne

PRAYER WALKING



Mary Makepeace reflects on the rhythm of Prayer Walking.

Prayer walking is simply praying whilst walking. It is inviting God's presence into your local area as you walk around it, speaking out blessings, prayers and scriptures. Whether you're prayer walking by yourself or with others, prayer walking is a powerful way to get active in prayer whilst enjoying God's creation, nature and fresh air.

In Joshua 1:3 God says: "I am giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on." Even today He calls us to be His people in pushing back spiritual darkness and claiming territory for Jesus.

Before I arrived in Brinkworth a friend I've made in the village and now a prayer walker companion told me whilst prayer walking, that she had been led to pray for Christians to move into our house. During prayer walking times you can speak out God's promises over the area and pray positively, even (and especially) in areas that are considered 'dark' or 'desperate'.

We focus on God's plan, purpose and destiny for the place and the people who live there. "Your Kingdom come, your will be done..." is an excellent start and you can use the Lord's prayer as a guide i.e.



"Lord, may the people in this area know you as Father. May they come into the knowledge and understanding that they have a Father in heaven who loves and has created them."

“Lord, may Your name be glorified and revered. May the people in this community lift up the Name that is above all other names and honour and respect your Name.”

“Lord, may Your Kingdom rule be evident here, may the Kingdom of heaven be established in this place. May Your will be done in each and every person’s life in this neighbourhood. May the fullness of Your Kingdom authority be made known and welcomed. May Your will be expressed in this area as it is in heaven.”

“Provide this day for the people in this area, and may forgiveness flow between them. Help them to lay down vengeance and hatred. May the temptations of the evil one be eliminated from their lives, and may those who live here, be delivered from the power of the evil one. May Your Kingdom, power and glory be welcomed in this place.”

It is so encouraging when you become aware of prayers being answered. On one prayer walking occasion we felt led to pray and speak out the scripture from Joel 2: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams and your young men will have visions”. We then heard of a girl who following a dream told her mother she wanted to be baptised. We recently celebrated with her family and friends her baptism at St. Michael’s and All Angels Church, Brinkworth.

Mary Makepeace

BELARUSIAN VISIT

Sergey and Tanya’s visit to England May 20th – 27th 2026.



We met Sergey and Tanya at Stanstead airport when they arrived in Britain on May 20th.

The visit had been long awaited after a difficult visa application process. After a reapplication and many prayers, both here and in Belarus, the visa was granted 10 days before they were due to travel.

Sergey had already agreed to preach and wanted to meet as many people who had supported their ministry over the years as possible. Matvey (his son) had told us that “Dad would expect to work!”

Their journey began on the 19th, very early in the morning, with a bus journey from Minsk to Warsaw. Sergey sent a photo as they crossed the border – and I jokingly said: “bring the sun!” [Sorry, this may make me responsible for that heat wave over the Bank Holiday weekend!]



From the airport, we travelled to Swindon via a Starbucks coffee to cool down as it was airconditioned. First, we called on Marcia, a Swindon piano teacher who travelled to Belarus in 2018 to help with Music camp. We then met Lidia and Mike for lunch at Dobies (as, because of their holiday, they would otherwise have missed the visit). The waitresses were very attentive and insisted they took photos.

We all had a wonderful time.

We had a quiet evening chatting about our families.

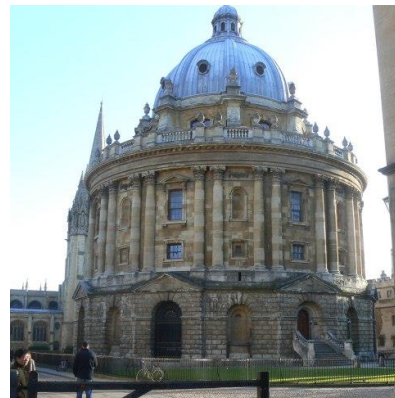
Thursday morning Tanya and Sergey were up early ready to ‘work’. Sergey investigated the garden and mowed the lawn and paddock – so much for a *holiday* in Britain! Our House group met in the afternoon and Olya from Purton joined us to translate. We did our usual Bible study and then people were able to ask questions and socialize. It was a very special time.



In the evening we drove to Purton for a worship evening in which we sang favourite songs chosen by Sylvia and shared prayers for Zaslavl and Purton churches. This was followed by a time of fellowship and refreshments provided by Sylvia – we were of course spoilt with many treats! Olya was there to translate, and Sergey shared about the Ministry - both in the Baptist Church, and to orphans.

The Purton folk have been supporters of Sergey's ministry for many years, and this was a lovely opportunity for them to meet. A concert is planned for September 26th 2026 at Purton Methodist Church, fund raising for ministry to orphans. When it is possible several of the ladies are planning to visit Belarus – and hope to attend the Summer Camp.

On Friday we had a day trip to Oxford, where we visited the Sheldonian Theatre in the morning. We then went on the tourist bus – with helpful, guided commentary for them in Russian. We stopped part-way along the route to visit Christchurch meadows and sat by the River Isis (Thames) for our picnic lunch. Sergey and Tanya love the camera – and we took many photos.



On Saturday there was a visit to Avebury – walking around the stones, visiting the house and the garden. We enjoyed a picnic – and the amazing weather! More photos of course! In the evening Mark Gillingham (Chairman of the Zaslowsky Project, which is no longer active) came to supper and to catch up with all the news. Mark like us has been unable to visit Belarus since 2019. It feels like a very long separation. His daughter-in-law came to translate – and, of course, there were photos.

On Sunday we worshipped in Brinkworth with Andrew leading the service, Sergey preaching Tanya and Sylvia joining the music group to lead the music. We were again blessed to have Olya with us, and she translated so naturally and beautifully. We had a shared lunch as a church in the village hall – it was good for everyone to be able to talk. It brought back many happy memories for me of church bbqs, church pizza and cola in Zaslavl. Their hospitality is always fabulous.



In the afternoon we went to Lydiard Park to the baptism of 100 Christians. What an exciting event – what an incredible witness!

The weather was amazing – perhaps a little warm? In the evening we were glad to rest in the garden. On Monday – it was Bank Holiday and we welcomed neighbours, church folk and friends from Purton to our garden. We had a great time talking and Olya was there to translate. We also enjoyed the great variety of Sylvia's cakes. In the afternoon we walked around Malmesbury – it was shady and cool, the Abbey and town museum. Sergey is very interested in history and was soaking this up to report back to the family. We finished the day with a walk around Ravensroost Nature Reserve; the air was pleasantly cool and sweet.

On Tuesday the weather forecast was very hot – 34 degrees - and we had a trip booked to London. We travelled by train – cool and relaxing. Lots of time sending photos home to Belarus – using the GWR wi-fi. We visited the Tower of London – which has changed greatly - with new interactive and digital displays. Fascinating! Picnic lunch under a very big tree – perfect. We then took the tube to Westminster to take a photo near the Houses of Parliament. Walked around Parliament Square then onward to Horseguards Parade just in time for the 'Punishment Parade' where an officer inspects the on-duty mounted sentries and footguards before they end their daily shift. I have walked around London many times but never before seen this courtyard parade -Wonderful – and a further opportunity for photos!

We went onto Trafalgar Square to pose by the fountains and enjoyed a cool drink in the shade before taking the bus to Paddington. We had already planned a meal at a family run Italian restaurant very near the station. Having found this restaurant several years ago we often try to visit it before coming home – the food did not disappoint. So much better than travelling on a rush hour train!

Wednesday arrived – the final day. Sergey was out in the garden mowing – preparing the garden for our family to visit. We shared stories, chatted, looked at wedding photos and generally had a wonderful, relaxed time. In the afternoon we drove to the airport at Stansted and said goodbye. It was so good that Freedom Church Wiltshire was able to give £425 for Pastor Sergei's ministry work with orphans and that this was increased to £2,334 by Purton Methodist Church and my musician friends. Supporting such amazing work. God made it possible and blessed us greatly – we all had a wonderful week!

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever.” Psalm 136:1. Psalm 107:1 and Psalm 118:1.

Fiona Fleet

BAPTISMS IN LYDIARD PARK

On Sunday 24th May the Vine Church, Swindon, hosted a large outdoor community event in which full immersion baptism of 100 teenagers and adults took place. Many from other churches attended to celebrate this public witness of those who have come to trust and give their lives to the Lord Jesus. It was an occasion full of



joy and worship as thanks was given to God. The church says that many of those who were baptised had experienced freedom from addictions, restoration after difficult life seasons and a renewed sense of purpose and direction. For them this was a fresh start and a new beginning. Each one carried a story – and together they formed a powerful picture of lives being changed by Jesus.



Mark Francey from Oceans Church, California, preached a powerful sermon and the church's worship band led sung worship throughout the baptisms. Baptism is a public affirmation of the change that Jesus has made in a person's life. Going under the water in total immersion pictures being buried with Jesus in His death and rising up symbolises coming to life with Him in His resurrection; but it is more than pictures and symbols. The descent into the water attests leaving behind the old, sinful life, while emerging from the water demonstrates the start of a clean, renewed spiritual life in which the Holy Spirit takes the lead.

It is also an act of visible testimony which is an encouragement to the whole church (the body of Christ) as each believer openly declares, in front of witnesses, their commitment to follow Jesus.

If you have never had the opportunity to make this public witness to Jesus through total immersion and give personal testimony to your family and friends, consider whether this is a step that God is calling you to make.

Andrew Fleet

HOLY. FREE.

Pastor Derek reports on the Free Methodist Church Conference UK & Ireland



This was the title of the Free Methodist Church UK & Ireland (FMCUK&I) 2026 Annual Conference which Hilary and I were privileged to attend. (I was a delegate and Hilary was a guest.) This 2-day conference took place at The Gateway Church, Preston. Most of the conference focused on encouraging and inspiring us as individuals and as churches to be living and flowing in the power of God's Holy Spirit. Spending time singing praises to the Lord helped us recognize that this Conference and the Free Methodist Church was about Him, not about us.

'Set free – Living free – Bringing freedom' is the strapline of the FMCUK&I. 'Set free' was the focus of the first session, reminding us that we are set free from sin and made holy through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christian life and ministry, it is all too easy to get weighed down by worries and responsibilities, and we need to be 'Set free' from these burdens.

We each brought a stone with us to represent our burdens, and in a prophetic act, we laid the stones down at the foot of a cross. From a garden area we then picked up white stones which had biblical words written on them, such as steadfast, overcomer, faithful, etc.

'Living free' was the theme of another session. Andrew Ollerton used the illustration of a train being free to move in power when it is on its tracks, but if it leaves its tracks, it gets stuck. We 'Live free' through keeping on track with the Lord, so that we are able to journey along empowered by His Spirit, and 'Bringing freedom' to others.

Two highlights from the conference were watching videos of at least a dozen baptisms which have happened in Free Methodist Churches during the past year, and the ordinations which took place on the Friday evening. This year there were eight ordinations, which is more than in previous years, and is a sign of the growth within this wonderful church family. Some of those ordained will be involved in local church ministry, one for schools' ministry, one for youth ministry, and three for prison chaplaincy. This indicates the various ministries that the Lord is calling the Free Methodist Church to be involved with.

A few hours were devoted to more formal business which was voted on by the Ordained Elders and Lay Delegates. This was presided over by Rev Keith Cowart, a Free Methodist Bishop from the USA who oversees the FMCUK&I. He shared that Rev John Townley (our current National Leader) will be retiring in May 2028, and he outlined the procedure of appointing a new National Leader. Please pray that the Lord will clearly guide this process.

The conference provides a wonderful opportunity to share fellowship with others within the Free Methodist Family. Hilary and I were also able to catch up with over a dozen people who, like us, have left the Methodist Church in Britain, and have found a new home within the Free Methodist Church. Over the past year the number of churches and church plants has increased from around 50 to almost 60; it's exciting to be part of a growing church family. Praise the Lord!

The final part of the conference was given over to prayer ministry. Those from one church prayed for those from another church, and vice versa. This enabled everyone to receive prayer to be filled afresh with God's Spirit to continue life and ministry in His name.

Derek Balsdon

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you HOPE for the future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

“Those who HOPE in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isiah 40:30

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST



The National Prayer Breakfast is an annual gathering of M.P.s, Peers, and church leaders within the Houses of Parliament to pray for the nation and discuss Christian values in public life. Some years ago, when Betty Boothroyd was Speaker of the House

of Commons, Fiona and I were privileged to be invited to attend in Central Hall, Westminster. It was uplifting to be amongst so many Christian M.P.s and Peers who prayed and spoke openly about their faith and to join the seminars which tackled some of the key moral issues which face our nation and consequently the political world and national governance.

These days the National Prayer Breakfasts are live streamed each year and so we were able to tune into Westminster Hall on 7th July to watch some 700 MPs (including the now new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham), Peers and church leaders pray and listen to key-note speaker **Clare Williams-Sarpong** (founder of Real Questions and Associate Speaker at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics) speak on 'Hope for the Future'.

Prayers were led by Marvin Rees, Lord Rees of Easton OBE, Ann Davies M.P., Rebecca Smith M.P., and Arlene Foster, the Rt. Hon the Baroness Foster of Aghadrumsee D.B.E. The Bible readings were given by Patricia Ferguson M.P.



Looking at the Gospel story, in Mark 10, of Jesus healing a blind beggar, **Clare Williams-Sarpong** said that Bartimaeus was on the margins of his society, yet Jesus cared for him. "Likewise," she said, "Many of you have entered politics because you believe that we ought to care for those on the margins."

"However," she added, "too often we ask politics and political victories to deliver more than they ever could. Not merely policy, but security, identity and even a sense of redemption.

This misplaced hope can leave us thoroughly disappointed. Disappointed by people, however impressive, or systems that crumble under the weight of expectations that they were never meant to carry. No person, no party, no institution can bear the weight, the burden of ultimate hope."

Every ideology eventually reveals its limits because no system can overcome the darker realities of the human heart, our fears and our self-interest, our desire for control. Part of our political disillusionment comes not merely from failed policies, but from asking too much of politics itself.”

She urged the audience to shift their mindset in the light of Jesus’ mission to restore humanity’s relationship with God and the hope expressed in His resurrection from the dead. “Today we are invited to hope and to imagine differently”, she said. “We are invited to steward the hopes of those whom we serve, to keep our own hearts soft and not hardened by disappointment.” She concluded: “Let us examine the claims of a God who enters history in the person of Jesus and bends it towards hope.”



The Chair of the Prayer Breakfast this year is **Tim Farron**, MP. In 2017, as leader of the Liberal Democrats, he came under pressure on his personal beliefs on homosexuality and same sex marriage, eventually resigning because he needed to ‘remain faithful to Christ.’

Closing the event, Tim spoke powerfully of his faith:

“Wouldn't it be wonderful, so unspeakably wonderful, if in this messed-up world of heartbreaks great and small, there really was hope? You see, hope isn't a party. Hope isn't an ideology. Hope isn't a philosophy. Hope is a person, and His name is Jesus.”

Pray for our Government and political leaders:

Wisdom and Discernment: Ask God to grant the King, Prime Minister, Cabinet, Members of Parliament (MPs), and local leaders clear insight into handling complex economic, social, and global challenges.

Integrity and Humility: Pray that leaders act with honesty, resist corruption, put aside selfish ambition or the love of power, and serve the public good above party politics.

Wise Counsel: Pray that they are surrounded by honest, capable, and moral advisors who offer sound guidance.

Personal Wellbeing: Lift up their families, marriages, and mental health, recognizing the heavy strain and pressure of public office.

Christian MPs and Peers: Pray for believers serving in Parliament to have strength, boldness, and grace to be a positive and Godly influence in the public sector.

Pray for our Nation:

The Vulnerable and Poor: Pray that policies protect and lift up the marginalised, the homeless, the elderly, families struggling with the cost of living, and those in need.

Justice and Righteousness: Ask that laws enacted in the UK uphold human dignity, defend the weak, and promote true peace.

Public Services: Pray for wisdom and adequate resources for vital institutions like the NHS, education systems, police, and social services.

Unity and Peace: Pray for healing across social, cultural, and political divides, fostering a society where people can live "peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness".²

Freedom for the Gospel: Pray that Britain remains a place where the Christian faith can be freely shared and the church can be an active, compassionate voice.

Andrew Fleet

OUR VISION

May 2024 – revised January 2026

We strive to be a church who are:

Seeking God's face, praying more deeply and responding to God speaking to us through His Holy Spirit.

Worshipping in a way which is participatory and engaging and focused on God's Word.

Believing that God wants us to share, minister and witness in natural and supernatural ways including answering prayer.

Caring and supportive of all our brothers and sisters.

² 1 Timothy 2:2

Focused on **Discipleship**:

- Exploring ways in which the **age demographic** of our fellowship can extend through provision of teaching and activities for young people. To be an all-age friendly church in which families are welcomed and cared for.
- Encouraging others who do not have a Christian commitment to know the good news of Jesus, be prayed with and commit to trusting God through Jesus Christ.
- **Encouraging others with Christian commitment** to join us, praying and caring for them and building them up in their faith in God through Jesus Christ and Christian discipleship.
- **Committed to service** in Jesus' name in our communities.
- **Growing in Prayer and the Spirit** both individually and as a corporate body: A designated 'Time for God' in worship focusing on the immediate presence of God and marked by prophecy, words of knowledge and praying in tongues.
- **Praying into and through the lives of our members**, interceding for others, for our country and for the world: the exercise of healing ministry through prayer, pastoral care and the anointing of the Spirit.
- **Giving to and engaged in mission and service** both locally, in the UK and overseas.

APPLYING THE VISION

1. Seeking and discerning the specific words and guidance that God is giving us on a day by day and week by week basis.
2. Prayer, Worship and Baptism of the Holy Spirit - sharing the gifts and living the fruit of the Spirit.
3. The reading and exposition of God's Word.
4. The appointment of a Nominating Task Group to oversee the annual selection of leaders.
5. The appointment of a part-time Pastor
6. The growth of our house fellowships for Bible Study and prayer.
7. The establishment of an annual Society Meeting which will pray and confirm the church's faithfulness to God's calling.

Into our Vision has come a practical application for Freedom Church Wiltshire which the leadership team has defined as:

- To double our numbers over a period of 3 years from 2024.
- Through this to lower our average age by ten years in the same period.

ANNUAL SOCIETY MEETING

Our Annual Society Meeting 2026 took place on Sunday 26th April in Brinkworth where the meeting adopted the following focus for the year ahead:

1. Church Life: To continue building on the good foundations of FCW, without making any major changes to church structures and activities yet remaining open to God's Spirit calling us to do new things.

2. Outreach: To further develop our outreach into the local areas, to encourage and equip one another individually and corporately to share Jesus more freely with others, to run events suitable to invite those who are not yet Christian to come along to, and this can include our 'in-house' breakfast. This particularly relates to our May 2024 vision to double our numbers by May 2027, and to lower our average by 10 years during that same period.

3. Christian Healing Ministry: To continue to develop the Christian Healing Ministry, both within FCW, and with other local Christians and churches.

4. Prayer: To increase our praying for protection, for revival, and for more of those we are in contact with to give their lives to Jesus Christ. This also relates to our May 2024 (revised 2026) vision. Also to identify a few prayer warriors, who will take a more combative role in the spiritual battle.

5. Gifts: To encourage people to increasingly use the natural abilities and spiritual gifts that they already have, and to seek and use other spiritual gifts.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 Peter 1:3

PREACHING PLAN



The new Preaching Plan, October to December, is now published.

Featuring in this Plan is our **Harvest Celebration** in October. This is a real opportunity for us to invite our neighbours and friends including those from the farming community to join us both for worship and for Harvest lunch.

Our mission giving between now and then will go to **the Swindon Food Collective and the Malmesbury & District Food Bank.**

Please note in your diary **Sunday 25th October 2026** and let's have a wonderful celebratory day in which we can raise our praise to God for His

manifold blessings, proclaiming "His goodness endures for ever."

On **Sunday 8th November** we will join the nation in remembering those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. This is our opportunity to honour human sacrifice to mourn the tragic cost of war, and to lament a broken world. Our remembrance is deeply connected to the Biblical call to remember God's goodness, practice grief and look forward to a lasting peace through Jesus, our Lord.

Christmas 2026

The new Plan covers the Advent and Christmas period. During Advent we will be focusing on the traditional preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This year there will be two carol services both of which afford opportunities for us to invite others to join us. On **13th December in Brinkworth** Derek will lead us in **Café Carols** and then on **20th December in Wanborough** Andrew will lead us in **Advent Carols.**

On **Christmas Day** we have been invited to join the Light Church in Royal Wootton Bassett at 10.00 a.m. for joyous Christmas worship and our own church will meet in **Wanborough on 27th December**, when our worship will be led by Hilary.

"Now faith is confidence in what we HOPE for and assurance about what we do not see"

Hebrews 11:1

FREE METHODISTS – WHO ARE WE?

We continue our extracts from the Free Methodist Church UK & Ireland (FMCUKI) Handbook.

Healthy Church



We believe a healthy church should have the following characteristics:

- **A Healthy Church Worships in Spirit and Truth**

Nothing can fully heal our souls, emotions and relationships more thoroughly than true worship of God. When we turn our hearts and minds toward God, we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and His outpouring of grace. We are changed as God turns our love from self to Him and to others. Worship involves “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” God promises to “fill” such people with all they need to serve Him.

- **A Healthy Church Prays Without Ceasing**

Throughout His ministry Jesus models to us the priority of prayer. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and gives thanks. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasises our dependence on God. God responds to our prayers by working change in us and in the circumstances and situations that we bring to Him.

We encourage all people to develop a daily personal prayer time and alongside this to participate in corporate prayer. Many of our leadership initiatives arise from these times of prayer together.

- **A Healthy Church Constantly Reaches the Lost for Christ**

Jesus came to “seek and save” the lost. He calls us, His disciples, to do the same thing. Every church must be committed to the principles, practices and prayers of “faith sharing.” Statistics show that over 75% of those who become Christians do so because of the testimony, deeds and encouragement of someone they trust.

- **A Healthy Church is an Enfolding Community that Produces Fully Devoted Disciples**

We work hard to see that church is more than friendly, more than welcoming, but rather enfolding. We want everyone to feel that they belong and know that they have a place. According to the Great Commission, disciples are made as Christians go to the lost, baptise those who believe and teach those who respond to do all that Jesus commanded us to do.

We value small groups within the church as an effective environment for the discipleship and care of all believers.

- **A Healthy Church Grows through Multiplication**

Within the church, we should regularly see the reproduction of disciples, leaders, groups and congregations. Every person and church is called for this purpose and has the joy of personally participating in Kingdom expansion.

- **A Healthy Church Ministers to the Poor and Disenfranchised**

That the poor have the gospel demonstrated to them by word and deed was one of the marks of the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Therefore, the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve our particular care. People who feel disconnected with society because of their condition, ethnicity or status need to both hear and see the good news of God's grace. We expect each of our churches to be ministering to the poor and disenfranchised.

- **A Healthy Church Engages in our World Missionary Movement**

Many Free Methodists travel abroad to work and minister in a variety of ways. Every local church is encouraged to participate in our world missionary movement by praying, supporting or going.

- **A Healthy Church Organises around its Mission**

We are committed to placing mission ahead of method. This means that all our structures must serve our mission. When a church understands its mission, making decisions about structure and function becomes clearer.

Personally

One of the distinguishing features of the church that we see in the New Testament, during the time of John Wesley and that of B. T. Roberts is that every disciple has a part to play. God has gifts and graces for every person to lead and serve as they follow Jesus. We believe that as God empowers disciples through the work of the Holy Spirit that each person is released into a joyful and purposeful life and is equipped with gifts to serve and reveal Jesus to those around them.

The Free Methodist Church desires to connect, equip and inspire each person to know God and to make Him known. We recognise that no one can fulfil this commission alone and so we are committed to building effective churches with each person fulfilling their part.



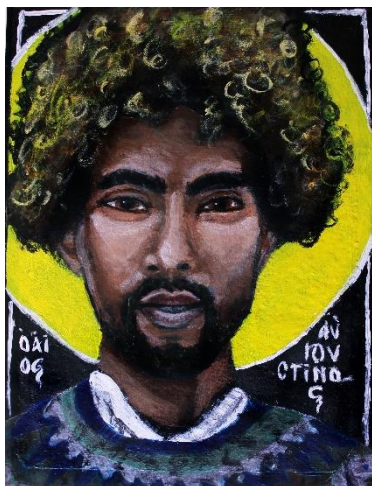
Belonging to a local church enables us to use our gifts to benefit those around us. We do not use our gifts to enhance our own reputation or status, but solely for the benefit of others. Spiritual gifts are given to each of us through the Holy Spirit and are given for building one another up. Every person has a valuable contribution to bring to the Body of Christ and should seek and nurture these gifts with love and wisdom. Through these acts of service God is glorified and people understand more fully the freedom they have been called into.

We believe each person has a role to play in using their gifts in a way that includes, invests, influences and increases.

Extract from: “Freedom – an introduction to the Free Methodist Church UK & Ireland.” Pub. 2023

HOPE

Monica lived in what is modern day Algeria and she prayed mother’s prayers for her son persistently. But despite this the boy grew up wayward. He lived a worldly life, fathered a child out of wedlock and spent nine years pursuing the pagan teachings of the Persian prophet Mani. He was a bright boy and



yet, when, as a young man, he moved to Milan he became a slave to lust and self-indulgence. Then, one day he met Ambrose, the Christian Bishop of that city who impressed him with his genuine warmth, intellectual eloquence and his ability to preach and teach God’s Word.

In the summer of 386 Monica’s son became overwhelmed by inner turmoil (what today would be classed as mental illness) and went to a garden to seek peace. There, as he wept under a fig tree, he heard a nearby child’s sing-song voice repeating: “Take, eat and read”. He felt God speaking to him through these words and picked up a copy of Paul’s letter to the Romans where he read:

“Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus...” (Romans 13:13-14).

In that moment his mother’s prayers were answered. In that moment he gave his life to Jesus. In that moment God began to use him. His internal struggle vanished to be replaced by an abiding peace. He shared his joyful news with his mother, Monica. He was baptised as a child of God by Bishop Ambrose in Milan in 387 AD.

This boy was called Augustine, who became Bishop of Hippo (the modern-day city of Annaba in Algeria). He wrote the very first Christian autobiography: ‘The Confessions’ – a collection of 13 books and greatly influenced the Christian Church.

The image of the young St. Augustine (shown) is painted by Gracie Morbitzer for the project "The Modern Saints", which reimagines traditional icons to portray the saints as they may have looked today. The ability to relate to them reminds us not only that they were just like us, but we can be saints like them, too! We are grateful to Grace for her permission to reproduce this beautiful piece of work.

© <https://www.themodernsaints.com/>

Personal Renewal

His message to the world is that hope is not a passive wish but begins with active force of the Holy Spirit creating personal renewal within each of us. He wrote of God: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (Confessions Book 1, Chapter 1).

True hope begins when a person’s desires are reordered and our focus is shifted away from fleeting earthly securities. This life transformation fills each individual with hope rooted in the risen Lord Jesus.

The Living Church

Renewed individuals naturally form communities bound by shared love and faith in God. Christian fellowship shows itself in charity, forgiveness and mutual love. These communities serve as active witnesses countering the brokenness of the surrounding world.

Hope for the Nation

In his book “The City of God” Augustine explains that Christians live simultaneously in the earthly city and the heavenly city.

While no earthly nation can ever fully become the Kingdom of God, the followers of Jesus, renewed citizens, bring justice, integrity and ethical leadership in the public square. Christian hope prevents despair during national crisis or political decay, anchoring the nation's moral conscience.

A Broken World

Augustine's Bible-based vision culminates in absolute certainty of Christ's final victory over sin and death. Earthly suffering, systematic injustice and global brokenness are temporary realities.

The ultimate hope in Jesus empowers believers to work tirelessly for justice today, knowing their labour is not in vain and that a perfected, restored creation – a new heaven and a new earth- awaits.

St. Augustine's Act of Hope – A Prayer

**For Your mercies' sake, O Lord my God,
tell me what You are to me.
Say to my soul: "I am your salvation."
So speak that I may hear, O Lord;
my heart is listening;
open it that it may hear You,
and say to my soul: "I am your salvation."
After hearing this word,
may I come in haste to take hold of you.
Hide not Your face from me.
Let me see Your face even if I die,
lest I die with longing to see it.
The house of my soul is too small to receive You;
let it be enlarged by You.
It is all in ruins;
do You repair it.
There are thing in it, [sic]
I confess and I know,
that must offend Your sight.
But who shall cleanse it?
Or to what others besides You shall I cry out?
From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord,
and from those of others spare your servant.**

Amen.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”

Revelation 23:4

“May the God of **HOPE** fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with **HOPE** by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

Derek Hilary Phil B Andrew Glenys Phil N

**Leadership Team, Freedom Church Wiltshire
September 2026**

*We are indebted to **David Hamshire** for his assistance in editing this Newsletter. Editorial skills require a sharp eye, good knowledge of the English language and an empathy to preserve the unique voice of the author. We thank David for his time, scrutiny and helpful suggestions.*

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