

**West Durham Methodist Circuit 24-hour Prayer Day - I will build my church.
9am Saturday 5th – 9am Sunday 6th September.**

Introduction

Welcome to the circuit 24-hours of prayer for the church!

We have set aside time today to help us discern God's will and purpose for us, His church. We join with others to pray that God will show us how to 'do' church and 'be' church as we emerge from lockdown. To do this we have:

- set up a 24-hour prayer rota which means we have individuals praying around the clock.
- online prayer sessions.
- prepared material to help focus our prayers.

To help us think about church, we are going to explore the characteristics of the early church. The New Testament gives us a number of images of the church which reflect varying aspects and characteristics of the early church. We thought it might be useful to consider some of these characteristics in our times of prayer. We hope this will help each of us reflect on what God is calling us to 'do and be' within our churches and communities.

The times of the online sessions along with the theme are:

9am	A loving community
12 noon	A transforming community
4pm	A united community
8pm	God's holy community
12 midnight	A community with no boundary
4am	A living community
8am	A shaped and sent community

The information below gives a flavour of what is covered in the online sessions and ends with some questions to think about/focus our prayers on. You can use this in a variety of ways. You may wish to sit down and consider each at the set times, or choose one or two themes to think about over the day or you may wish to use material over the coming weeks as we continue to think and pray about church.

Whenever and in whatever way you use this, we pray that God will speak to you as you pray. If you feel there is something you would like to share (a prayer, an idea, a verse, a vision) then, we have created a Forum which can be accessed via the [following link](#). If you are unable to access a computer, perhaps you could ask your church contact to add this to the Forum for you. If you do make a comment – please remember that it is there for us all to see. (To access the Forum, you will need the password from the email about the Prayer Day that was sent out by the Circuit Administrator. More detailed instructions on the use of the Forum are on the Stanhope Methodist Church web site [here](#).)

The 24-hours of prayer will end at 9am on Sunday 6th September and will be followed by our morning service online at 10.30am.

Find your own way to pray.

To start, here is an idea from Dorothy: "As part of the Prayer Day I will be tying ribbons to my Holly Tree as prayer symbols for the different aspects of community and there just happens to be 7 sessions and seven colours of the rainbow!

- Loving Community - red
- Transforming Community - orange
- United Community - yellow
- God's Holy Community - green
- Community without Boundary - blue
- Living Community - indigo
- Shaped and Sent - violet

As they flutter in the wind the prayers will rise to God through the power of the Holy Spirit and as I pass by, I will be reminded about all that makes up community.

At the start of the pandemic Rev Bruce sent us prayers for each day of the week and these days were coloured with rainbow colours.

A Golden Thread of God's covenant.”

You may think of other ways of praying today. If you do – why don't you message us on the Forum and post a photograph too!!

9am Saturday 5th September - Prayer Session 1: A Loving Community

Image: church as God's friends - John 15: 12-17. Session led by Rev. Bruce Sawyer.

This first image of Church is all about relationship. It reminds us that we aren't just any community. We are a community who comes into being because of our relationship not with one another, but with God. God chooses to call us friends and this is what brings us together. But just as important is that our relationship with one another is characterised by love. Our relationship with God, our friendship with God, should be revealed in the way that we love one another.

Jesus' words to his disciples paint an image of a community characterised by their intimate relationship with God, and by their love for one another.

Some questions to consider and pray about:

1. What does it mean to be called God's friend? How does that make you feel?
2. Jesus characterises his friends as those with whom he has shared everything, to whom he has been open. How open to God are you at the moment? Are there things you are holding back? Share them with God. Invite God into that part of your life.
3. Think of your church – what words would you use to describe its life? What are its characteristics? Would others say of it “look how those Christians love one another”? If not, what needs to be different?

12 noon Saturday 5th September - Prayer Session 2: A transforming community.

Image: church as salt and light - Matthew 5:13-14. Session led by Sue and friends.

Before lockdown I can hear myself saying to friends with some frustration, “I get more interesting conversation about God from members of the community than I do from Sunday congregations. They should be interested in getting to know God better.”

Well, lockdown has challenged me far more because, to be fair, most of my conversations have been with community and far less with church members. Actually, it is the conversations with those who do not know God that are more important. The questions and conversations I have had about God in recent months have been much more difficult - but have made me realise that whilst some people are wary, thinking you are going to try and impose something on them (not surprising when you hear some of their personal experiences of “Church”!), a significant number have deep and interesting questions to ask. The challenge is ‘am I up to engaging in the discussion in a fair and open way that does justice to God?’ Yet again, God is teaching me to trust in His strength, for on my own I am not!

I have chosen some Bible passages you may wish to reflect upon and consider how you individually and we as Church in Community measure up: Romans 12:1-21, Philippians 2:1-11, Isaiah 58:9-14, Isaiah 61: 1-4, James 1:27, Leviticus 19:18

Questions to consider:

- How do we get the right measure of salt to be tasty but not unhealthy?
Are we prepared to take light into the darkness of today?
How prepared are we to welcome those with challenging questions and respond?

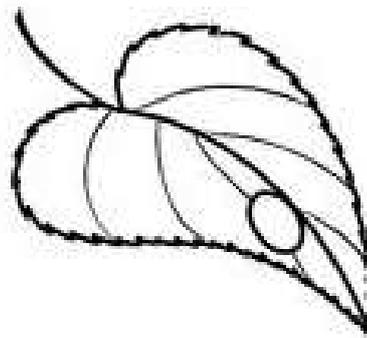
Prayer Focus:

Young at heart or body.

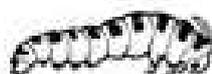
Design your own butterfly or colour the picture below. Consider the care God takes with creation and with you - how can you do your best for God as God does His best for you? How do we grow into the best we can be and how do we help others achieve their best too?

Life Cycle of a Butterfly

Directions: Cut pictures apart. Mix them up. Put the pictures in the correct sequence, starting with the egg.



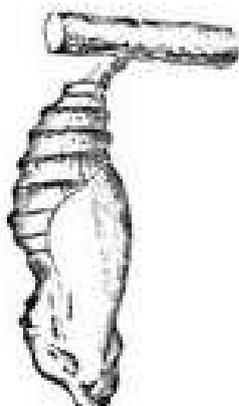
egg



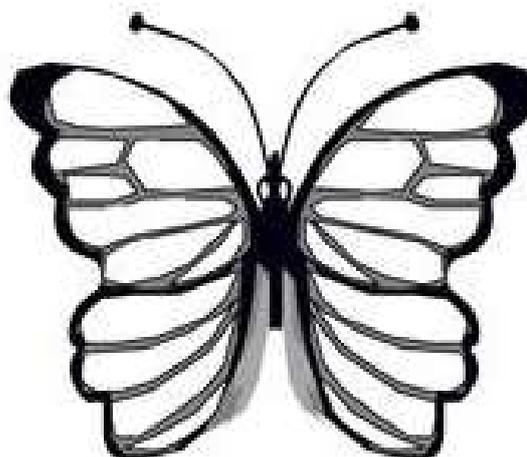
little caterpillar



big caterpillar



cocoon



butterfly

4pm Saturday 5th September - Prayer Session 3: A united community.

Image: church as One - Ephesians 4:1-6. Session led by Rev. Chris Humble.

Within our churches, there is a wide range of opinions and viewpoints about all sorts of things. Within the circuit, there are diverse thoughts and ideas - we see things differently. St Paul seemed to be aware of this and said we should remain united since there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and one God (Ephesians 4:3-4). Despite our differences, we are one as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Questions to consider:

Does the above description describe your church and our circuit?

How can we foster a greater sense of unity?

Prayer Focus:

1. Think about the image of 'being one' and compare with your church and our circuit.

Spend time praying about this. Ask yourself what is important and what unites us. Here are some other verses that might help you: John 17:20-23, Romans 15:5-7, Colossians 3:12-15.

2. Paul warns against disagreements and urges us to 'Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.' (Colossians 3:13).

Think back over the past few months or even longer. Have you been offended or upset by a comment or action of someone at church? If so, talk to God about it. Consider 'letting go' of it and handing it over to God. Ask God to help you forgive. Ask God for His peace.

3. Different people will have different opinions. Think about how you cope with views and ideas about church that are different from yours. Pray about this. Are there things which stop you 'hearing' the other person's view? How can we discern how to 'do' church and 'be' church? Ask God to show you this.

8pm Saturday 5th September - Prayer Session 4: God's holy community.

Image: church as a God's chosen people - 1 Peter 2:9. Session led by Phil.

To be Holy means to be set apart. God is Holy because he is unique, completely different from anyone and anything else. God calls us to be Holy too - we are to be His Holy People.

Through Jesus, we are made right with God - but that doesn't mean that we immediately become holy. We become holy by the Holy Spirit living in us and transforming us. We have to want to be holy. We need to let go of the sins, behaviours and habits that we cling on to, to surrender our will and desires to God. We have to rely on God's strength and on his forgiveness when we fail.

Here are some other readings to reflect on: Leviticus 20:26, John 17:15-16.

Questions to consider:

Do you really want to be holy? What gets in the way and what do you most struggle with?

What does it mean for the church to be set apart? Are we in danger of isolating ourselves from the world around us and what can we do about that?

Is a Holy Community any different from a group of holy individuals? Are we being too individualistic as Christians? How can we challenge and support each other to become holy? In what ways do our churches need to change so that we can grow into a holy nation?

Prayer Focus:

1. Talk to God about the temptations that you struggle with - the things that stop you being holy. Ask for His forgiveness and the desire and strength to change.

2. Bring your own church – the community of Christians - before God and ask for His wisdom, guidance and inspiration in how you can challenge, encourage and support each other in becoming a holy community.

To help settle you into overnight prayers – some words from Joyce

“There is something special about praying during the night-time hours. No chance of the phone ringing, no distractions of the day, a peace that is difficult to experience during daylight hours. There comes a deep sense of being alone with God.

Maybe you are a natural insomniac and don't need an alarm, but for those of us who need a little help to begin our prayers this short time of preparation might be helpful.

If the weather allows, wrap up warm and go outside for a little while, maybe to a favourite spot in your garden, and just BE. Take in the beauty of the night sky.... the moon and stars....the cloud formation.... As you stand in awe of God's creation remember the words of Psalm 8: “O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the whole earth.....What are mere mortals that you should think of them”and give thanks.

When you feel ready come inside, make a hot drink and settle yourself into your prayer time with the words of Psalm 27: “My heart has heard you say “Come and talk with me” and my heart responds “Lord I am coming””

12 midnight Sunday 6th September - Prayer Session 5: A community with no boundary.

Image: church as an inclusive people - Galatians 3:27-28. Session led by Rev. Chris Humble.

In this passage, Paul describes the old distinctions of his time (Jews/non-Jews, freemen/slaves, men/women). In Paul's day, the Jews were inside the covenant of God whilst the non-Jews were on the 'outside'. Jews, freemen and men were more highly regarded than non-Jews, slaves and women. Paul challenged that; he declared that we are all one in Christ and we are all included in God's kingdom. The church as a community is called to be inclusive.

Questions to consider

How inclusive are we?

Do we listen to the viewpoint of all? Do we listen to viewpoint of the minority as well as majority?

Prayer focus

1. Slowly and deliberately re-read the passage from Galatians. Ask God to help you answer these questions honestly. You might find it helpful to write down your thoughts.

2. Think about the composition of your congregation: who makes it up? How different is it to your local community? Who is not represented? Pray about this. Ask God to show you how to be more inclusive.

3. Chris said: **‘The church welcomes all - as God made all, loves all and welcomes all.’**

Consider what you might regard as a good welcome and a 'not so good welcome' to church. Think about how you welcome people in your church. Does your church seek to be a welcoming church with no distinctions? Spend time praying about this.

4am Sunday 6th September - Prayer Session 6: A living community.

Image: church as the body of Christ - 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 & 27. Session led by Ingrid.

The description of the church as a body is well known – everyone with a part, working together to build it up, filled and led by the Holy Spirit. Here are some other passages about the body: Romans 12:4-8, Colossians 1:18. Ephesians 4:11-13.

A body is complex; muscles, tendons, ligaments held on a frame of multiple bones, all holding in place essential organs, all served by a complex system of blood vessels and nerves and all controlled by a highly

complex brain. Each body part needs the others to work effectively and efficiently. Importantly, the body needs oxygen or breath to keep it alive.

Within the church, we are all different: we are good at different things and have differing skills and gifts from God. Our 'oxygen' is God's Spirit living in us. In the Bible, the Hebrew word "Ruach" is often found in passages referring to the Holy Spirit. It is translated as 'breath of life'. Jesus offers us his life-giving Spirit.

Some questions to consider:

- Do we, the church, function as one body? Do we use our gifts for God?
- Do we value the contribution of each other? Do we value our own gifts as highly as the gifts we see in others?
- Do we all work together to build God's church?

If we don't – what stops us?

Prayer Focus:

1. Prayerfully, think about the things you are good at doing - at home, at work, at school, at church. You might find it useful to write them down. These are your 'gifts'. Give thanks for these gifts. Spend time asking God to show you how these gifts can be used to build up his body – within church and in your community.
2. Think about your church and the people whose gifts are completely different from yours. Write down their names and give thanks for them and their gifts. Pray for them.
3. Sometimes we feel overloaded with tasks within church. Spend time praying about these. Ask God what he wants you to do. Ask God if there is some task or role you need to pass to someone else. Be open to what God says to you.
4. Physically our bodies get tired. As individuals within the body of Christ, we can grow tired and weary. We are reminded that our strength does not come from ourselves but from God. We need to rely on him. We need to be replenished and refilled by his Spirit. His Spirit lives in us (Ephesians 2:22). Take a few moments to read John 7:37-39. Ask God to fill you with his Spirit.

8am Sunday 6th September - Prayer Session 7: A shaped and sent community.

Image: church based on the apostles - Matthew 28: 16-20. Session led by Rev. Bruce Sawyer.

The Church is a community that is shaped by the teaching of the Apostles. We don't just come together as any old bunch of people, but we are shaped by the understanding of God that is handed on to us from the apostles, from their encounters with the risen Christ. In addition, we are a community that is sent. In fact, the word apostle means 'one who is sent'. The disciples are apostles because Jesus sends them: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations". The Church is Apostolic because God continues to send us into the world, to share the good news of God's love for the world in Jesus.

In this passage, Jesus both sends the disciples, and instructs them to teach others. As Church we are therefore to be a community both shaped by the faith and teachings of the apostles, and sent to share the news of God's love.

Some questions to consider and pray about:

1. The Apostles' Creed, an ancient summary of the teachings of the apostles, is still used in our Baptism services. What does it mean for you to believe this Creed?
What would a church shaped by, and living out, the beliefs of this Creed look like?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

2. Make a paper aeroplane. As you fold it, think about how the faith of others, the living traditions of the Church handed on, have shaped you, and give thanks. Think too about how God might be using you to shape others.

How are you being shaped by the Apostles' teaching? (e.g. when do you read the Bible? How do you engage in this with others? Does this happen regularly and intentionally?)

How is/could your church help shape others?

3. Who are the people God has sent you to? Where are the places God is sending you to?

Throw your paper aeroplane (several times!) and pray for these people/places.

What does a church that is sent look like?

What would better enable you to "Go"?
