

# Conference Recorder

A special five-page focus on some of the Methodist work happening in Birmingham – this year's Conference city.

## Assessing and furthering God's work in the West Midlands

THIS year, the circuits of the Birmingham District were asked to review the state of the work of God in their circuit, through the lens of District Mission Statements. With increased depth of discipleship, societal change and growing membership as their core aims, the focus has been on growing and diversifying the leadership pool and taking Church beyond its traditional 'four walls'. The next five pages contain just a few of the many initiatives and events that have taken place in this diverse and dynamic region.

Compiled by the Rev David Butterworth



### An inclusive welcome from Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant

AS Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of the West Midlands – the second largest lieutenancy in the country, covering 2.8 million people – may I warmly welcome all representatives to the Methodist Conference 2017 in Solihull, part of the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

We are a region that remains proud of our roots. In the early Victorian era, Birmingham was constitutionally an open city, not a chartered borough, and, therefore, free to welcome people of all faiths and orthodoxies. At the time, the warmth of that welcome extended to all Nonconformists, the Quaker Cadburys perhaps being the best known.

#### Nature

This is very much part of our nature today. Inherent in our DNA. University of Birmingham research has disclosed that in the three years running up to 2010, we welcomed people moving here from 187 different countries. We are acutely conscious that we cannot simply rely on that "nature", indeed if that is what it is, but that it must be our nurture too – we must



Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant, West Midlands, John Crabtree.

cherish it and live by it. I do very much hope that the Conference is a great success and that the Methodist community will con-

tinue to work hand-in-hand with those of all faiths and beliefs.

*John Crabtree OBE, Lord Lieutenant – West Midlands*

### Mayor of the West Midlands gives a historic welcome to the District

ON May 4, 2017, I was proud to be elected as the first Mayor of the West Midlands. In such a diverse region, it brings with it some significant responsibility.

Our diversity in the West Midlands is a powerful asset, with people who come from every country, practise every faith and speak every language.

For us to restore pride in the West Midlands, we must make sure that everyone here respects and values everyone. This is not just about words like cohesion or integration, it is about saying hello to your neighbour, teaching your children about other cultures and making an effort to befriend and help people you normally would not.

When I have been speaking to people on the campaign trail, it is clear that



Methodist Church members with partners from local mosques, the CEOs of Citizens UK, Sisters of Mercy, UNISON and Community Housing, with Mayor Andy Street (centre).

people from all communities want to be included and shown respect, rather than treated as a minority group.

To be a successful and thriving region in the 21st century, we need to work together to unlock the potential we have.

As Mayor I intend to lead this important work. As Mayor, I will: support the Police in a zero tolerance approach to hate crime; champion inter-faith initiatives to bring dif-

ferent religious groups together; make sure there is funding available for everyone in the West Midlands to learn English and support schools teaching our children religious education, cultural education and British values, include faith and community leaders in a Mayor's Taskforce on community and integration. – Andy Street, Mayor, West Midlands Combined Authority

### To Methodists returning to the NEC...

I WOULD like to take this opportunity to welcome you back to Birmingham's NEC campus where, increasingly, our businesses are working together to ensure you have an enjoyable and fulfilling time when you are here. That theme of working together is consistent across the region currently as our new West Midlands Mayor Andy Street, a Conservative, leads a cabinet of leaders from the seven councils – each of them Labour-led – that make up the West Mid-

lands Combined Authority (WMCA). Going forward, the Mayor will provide a strong voice for the region, representing our collective spirit, vision and ambition. Good civic leadership is essential and we can now consider how we work together to accelerate the region's economic growth, create more jobs for local people and provide the necessary skills and training needed to fulfil



# A District of diversity, beauty and challenge

A welcome to the West Midlands from Chair of the Birmingham District the Rev Ian Howarth and Chair of the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District the Rev Rachel Parkinson

ALTHOUGH it is only three years since Conference came to the Hilton on the NEC site in Solihull, much has changed in the West Midlands since then. On the NEC site itself, what was a building site three years ago is now Resorts World, a £150 million complex which attracts thousands of visitors every week, for its shops, restaurants, casino and cinema.

Many of our city centres also have major building works in progress as the region seeks to expand its commercial life, in the face of the decline of traditional manufacturing.

Alongside the commercial building, there has been political change, with the elec-



tion of the first mayor of the combined West Midlands authority, which includes Wolverhampton, Walsall, Solihull, Sandwell, Dudley, Coventry and Birmingham. In a closely-fought election in May, the Conservative Andy Street, former CEO of the John Lewis partnership, was elected



mayor. We wait to see what impact that makes on the life of the region.

In contrast to burgeoning commercial development, the region also contains some of Britain's most deprived areas. The impact of the decline of the motor trade means there are many large estates with

high levels of poverty.

There is a wonderful diversity across the region, with communities from many parts of the world, many of them sharing their customs and culture to the enrichment of all. But this also presents its challenges, with the danger that some communities become isolated from wider society, both socially and economically.

Outside the conurbations are areas of wonderful natural beauty such as the Cotswolds and the Marches, where the rural economy presents a different set of issues. Poultry farming is a significant activity in the Marches which made Avian flu a challenge this year, while tenant farmers in Here-

fordshire are affected by the sale of 4,200 acres of farmland by Herefordshire County Council. The effects of Brexit on the rural areas are yet unknown, but likely to be significant.

## Mission

This is the context in which the Methodist Church in the region seeks to minister and share in God's mission.

Through our chaplaincies we are present in the commercial and the rural economies of the region. Through our engagement with refugees and anti-trafficking initiatives we reach some of the most vulnerable people in society. Through our engagement in inter-faith dia-

logue and community work in multi-faith areas we seek to build bridges across the tensions that sometimes divide communities.

Above all, through our local churches we have a Christian presence in communities of all descriptions across the region, reaching out in love and care to all, telling the story of Jesus, in word and deed, to bring hope and healing in a vast range of contexts, seeking to build some new communities of faith in areas – or among groups – with whom the traditional church has failed to engage. These pages will give a little taste of ways in which we endeavour to engage in God's mission in the region today.

## To Methodists returning to the NEC...

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these roles. As a business, we have a lot in common with the WMCA, and, together, we want to build a brand for Birmingham that we can all stand behind and be proud of as we approach one of the biggest phases of growth and development for the region in the recent past. While our customer experience is at the heart of everything we do, the NEC Group values its staff immensely and to reflect that we invest in the Methodist Church Chaplaincy which has been with NEC since the venue opened in 1976 while the Methodist Church reciprocates with investment of commitment and faith. The chaplaincy ethos is now a



Paul Thandi DL – CEO, NEC Group.

very well established part of the NEC client experience and staff wellbeing, welcoming people of all faiths or those expressing no faith at all. Like Conservative Andy



An aerial view of the NEC complex and the surrounding area.

Street and his Labour-led cabinet, we should put aside our political and religious differences and work together to make the most of what we have and in times of change,

for better or for worse, take strength and inspiration from our friends and colleagues. I hope you enjoy your Conference. – Paul Thandi DL – CEO, NEC Group

## Birmingham's drive for ground-breaking 21st century church ministry

THE Birmingham District launched "Church Without Walls" – an inclusive Gospel movement that builds new relationships by starting new congregations, revitalising existing ones and raising up new leaders – with a Birmingham synod session on testimony.

The initiative is part of the District's long-term goal of becoming a hub of new mission and ministry experimentation for 21st century Britain. District Mission adviser Trey Hall said: "In the midst of seismic cultural changes, we dream of a bold, growing church that

doesn't retreat into locked-up buildings but risks finding freedom in the world, in ministry with people of every race, gender, age and ability, sexuality, perspective and politics."

## Conversations

The first year of Church Without Walls involves starting missional conversations in every area of the District, equipping leaders with practical tools for evangelism and building confidence for faith-sharing and launching new forms of Church.

## Artists respond to God and mental health issues

MENTAL health issues are an increasing concern in the West Midlands and worldwide.

While some safe spaces exist for people to speak of these concerns many people still do not talk to anyone.

Eddy Aigbe, who is a lay employee and artist and tutor, was invited to speak of his own story. His powerful testimony connected to many people at Political Night Prayer and subsequently at local worship spaces, too, where several people were moved to tears reflecting on his artwork and the safe space provided.

Mr Aigbe reflected on Timothy 1.4. 14 – 15: "Do not neglect the gift you have... Practise these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress." He

sees that art is a gift and an excellent tool of expression. "I'm currently focusing on taking away the superficial and false rhetoric, with the intent to expose the deeper issues that affect our human psyche."

In so doing, Mr Aigbe hopes to trigger positive dialogue, to encourage support for those affected by mental illnesses and to inspire action that will bring lasting solutions. Inspired by Ephesians 2. 10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them", the artist infuses his work with the healing message of Christ in symbolic form, as a way of encouraging humanity to embrace the Gospel truth in loving God and neighbour.



## The mysterious P How a creative deacon got pec

ADVENT in 2016 saw a mysterious Banksy-esque guerrilla artist come to prominence in Penkridge. Later unmasked as the pebble-painting Picasso, Deacon Sue Culver explains more...

"Every night during Advent last year, I went out under the cover of darkness and started 'planting' pebbles at random – in flower beds, on litter bins, on street corners, shop window sills; wherever I could. Each pebble was decorated and had a scripture reference on the back relating to love in some way.

The result was astonishing, from radio broadcasts wanting to know who the mystery Penkridge Banksy was, to organised pebble hunts by the local Brownie pack. Photographs started appearing on social media and magazine articles were written. Everyone was keen to either find a



Some of the mystery pebbles.

pebble themselves or to identify the planter. The Scripture references on the back caused a bit of a stir, too. Initially, thoughts being shared on Twitter made reference to the secret codes or the back of the stones, but



Outreach continues to be supported by the Church throughout the wider area

# Outside church walls... chaplaincy services in the West Midlands

CROSS the whole of the West Midlands, chaplaincy is thriving in circuits, schools, colleges, universities, retail centres, hospitals, radio stations, police and services, factories, waterways, airports, sports clubs, factories, commercial and rural and agricultural settings. Chaplaincy enriches the church by bringing back daily encounters – showing the joys and needs of the wider community – into circuit staff and preachers' meetings, mission groups and Sunday worship through testimony and illustration.

Chaplaincy naturally looks to work in collaboration with our ecumenical and inter-faith partners and other individuals. As the Methodist Conference returns to the NEC campus, 2017 also marks the 40th year of Cchaplaincy at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC Group).

Today the NEC Group welcomes more than 3 million visitors every year and provides the equivalent of 29,000 full-time jobs. At its centre it has a fine-tuned management

team which thinks differently at every juncture to ensure the visitor experience is as good as it can be. The inter-faith chaplaincy is central to that business ethos and recognises the pastoral-heart culture daily. The comments in the feedback books in the prayer/quiet rooms are a testimony to how well received the sanctuary space is.

Methodism's ongoing commitment to chaplaincy, in the West Midlands and beyond, continues to lift awareness of "church outside the walls" and explores the case for a "chaplaincy inside the church walls", too. This focus looks to offer support to those who use church premises.

The NEC chaplaincy at the International Convention Centre (ICC), the Barclaycard Arena and the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) has "thought differently" over the years to ensure it remains relevant in a business context and offers pastoral care grounded in understanding. PC World and Carphone Warehouse are just two such com-



The Rev David Butterworth celebrates the 40th year of the NEC and chaplaincy.

panies which have requested chaplaincy services at the NEC.

For example, at the ICC, the Teachers Union NASUWT request facilities for Sunday worship if their conference runs over Easter, saying that know-

ing that worship is available makes their journey and time commitment to the conference much easier to accommodate for many of their clients

In the West Midlands and across the UK there is an ever-

increasing need for inter-faith engagement and wider recognition of the spiritual richness that is to be found in the collaboration of faiths in all social contexts. The inter-faith prayer and quiet rooms at the NEC

and other large venues in the West Midlands are a perfect example of safe spaces where people can retreat from the chaos of daily work or shopping and speak with the chaplain or simply "be".

Chaplains in the West Midlands are generally happy to visit circuit meetings to help staff or church family explore chaplaincy "outside church walls" or "inside church plant", or indeed a combination. Chaplains in the West Midlands offer Sunday worship illuminating chaplaincy in Wolverhampton, Birmingham Children's Hospital or Warwick, retreat times for Churches Together, reflection times for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, MHA chaplains or as key note speakers on chaplaincy for District days such as MWIB and church anniversaries. There is also a rich heritage of academic chaplaincy in the region at institutions such as the Queens Foundation and Newman's University and awareness days with the Connexional "One Mission".

## From Zimbabwe to a joyful ministry of presence

AS a probationer, the Rev Farai Mapamula's ministry in Birmingham has been joyful, encouraging, affirming and a huge privilege. It has also been a learning curve that has challenged both her thinking and practice. Born and raised in Zimbabwe, the

ministry of women in particular has shaped and informed her sense of self as a Christian. In her presentation at the recent Birmingham synod, she spoke of "a ministry of presence, which affirms, encourages, nurtures and is both proactive and re-

active". This position has meant that women – lay and ordained – are always ready to respond to human need in times of suffering.

This has influenced her ministry here in the vibrant, diverse city of Birmingham. Farai Mapamula has wit-

nessed a high incidence of homelessness and other social issues since moving to the city.

It is this ministry of presence that, in her view, will make the task of living out our faith in our communities a journey of discovery,

surprise and of love and grace. Farai Mapamula (pictured, right) remarks: "We will go far, only when we travel this journey together, for the common good with a unity of purpose and mission; to serve God's people and indeed all creation."



## Penkridge Pebbles

... talking about the Bible

They were soon recognised as references from the Bible and people began to look them up and share them with the picture of their stone.

In one local pub where a stone had been left, I realised that I had made an error with the Scripture verse when the landlord put a picture on Facebook with: "And Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, 'Give me a drink.'" One woman shared the story of one of her children, so debilitated by depression they were on the brink of suicide. They found one of the pebbles and believed that this was a sign that they were going to get better."

The fruits of this labour continue to be harvested says Deacon Sue: "Stones with poppies painted on them led directly to me being approached to become the chaplain to the ATC; warm rela-

tionships have developed with the local Brownie pack and the local Scout troop and many come into church now as part of their faith and community badges.

"The pebbles are still spoken of and I often get recognised as the 'vicar-that-paints-the-stones' and a link has now been made with the Thy Kingdom Come global call to prayer initiative because the prayer mandala design on the stone has also been used to decorate large letters PRAY.

These have been used in and around the village encouraging people to either pray or be prayed for.

Again, the response has been astonishing and most people want to talk to you – they simply need a reason to do so and all it took here in Penkridge was a few pretty stones that made people smile."

## Mid-Warwickshire steps up to the District Mission Statement with new initiatives

MID-Warwickshire has enjoyed a varied programme of events and initiatives that reflect the District Mission Statement of Outside Church Walls.

Outdoor services and events were initiated, including a popular picnic service to mark a minister's fond farewell in summer 2016, which led to the decision to run outdoor services at three more churches. Four eye-catching teardrop flags have been used on numerous occasions to draw attention to events in – and outside – churches in the circuit.

### Families

More than 300 families took part in a "Walls of Jericho" stall at the Kenilworth Arts Festival. The flags are now employed across the circuit, welcoming people to various events and worship.

Konec4 contemporary worship – a monthly event based at Dale Street church in Leamington – takes place at 8pm every fourth Sunday. A young couple connected at this outreach event



Teardrop flags have been put to use at outdoor initiatives in the Mid-Warwickshire circuit.

and subsequently married at the church this April. The groom is an experienced worship leader from an independent church and a new worship band, in-

cluding two younger members playing keys and drums, has grown around him. It is exciting to see God at work in this.

Supporting new leaders is often about protecting them from those who are suspicious of change and unwilling to make space, but the circuit has intentionally made this space to allow change to happen naturally. In the next few months the circuit will take the theme "Beyond the wood and stone" to heart and plant three new congregations anywhere except in existing church buildings.

The circuit has also embarked on a renewed programme of pastoral visitor training – to address the decreasing number of visitors – in light of up to half of some of the circuit's congregations living in sheltered accommodation or nursing homes.

The past 18 months have also seen strong ongoing links being made with five local primary schools in one area. In light of this the circuit is looking to recruit a schools' worker, based in Kenilworth, to develop this ministry further.



# Political Night Prayer meetings: 'There is no spirituality, no faith and even no hope without resistance'

THE aim of Political Night Prayer is to create space for prayer within the realities of our public life and our hope in God's future.

The initiative regularly attracts members and District Chairs from the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District and the Birmingham District alongside ecumenical and community friends from across the West Midlands.

## Reflection

Besides prayer, conversation and rigorous, informed reflection, contemporary public life and reality take centre stage.

Political Night Prayer speaks a radical, prophetic

Gospel into our common life; it celebrates a kingdom vision and laments the damage done, yet nurtures solidarity. It seeks to resource and encourage people working and living with diverse situations and inspire movement to collective action.

The first Birmingham Political Night Prayer took place in August 2016 at St Andrew's Stinchley, with 50 people. The second meeting – in December 2016 – required a larger meeting place, found at the ecumenical Cotteridge church, where more than 100 people gathered.

The theme of the interdependence of the human family and the Body of Christ confronted the divisive and dis-

torting aspects of the Brexit and Trump campaigns.

The third meeting around Easter, was themed on "Breaking down / breaking through" and reflected on the realities of mental ill health in times of intense political and economic stress.

## Consuming

The fourth meeting will be held this September, the season of Harvest and Creation. The theme will be "Being earthed and grounded in an age of consuming".

Responding to a need for prayer, the Rev Donald Eadie, in collaboration with tutor at Queen's Foundation and a Birmingham presbyter, the

Rev Gary Hall, said: "As a summary, the Night Prayer is the (political, social, religious) event, not merely a commentary on events.

"Our congregating around a radical Gospel is political action, a commitment to solidarity and a willingness to be disrupted and transformed by the spirit of the risen Christ.

"Perhaps this is true of every act of public worship. We gather in trust, or in hope and frustration, desire and disappointment, passion and bewilderment, fire and ice. The work here is worship, reflection, conversation, encounter and imagination. We are not here to fix or organise anything.

"Maybe out of this gathering other things will follow. Something has already happened – and something is happening – in our coming together. Congregating matters, where we discover who we are to one another, where we remember mutuality and interdependence, where we practice communing.

## Parable

"This is not an alternative to anything, least of all alternative worship: like any act of Christian worship, it is just another little parable of our daily life together in the webs we weave as societies, as human family, waiting on God, wrestling with God, to

whom all hearts are open, all desires known..."

Political Night Prayer picks up the tradition initiated by Dorothee Soelle back in the Cold War days in Germany. Its essence can be connected to a piece she wrote in *The Journal of Law and Religion* (Vol VIII Nos 1 and 2, 1990, 433-436), "Saying Yes and Saying No: Rendering to God and Caesar": "There is no spirituality, no faith and even no hope without resistance. In a night of global economic injustice that has to be sustained by the ongoing militarisation not only of the globe but also of the human mind and its research, there shines the light of liberation as resistance."

## CitizensUK keeps social justice campaigning alive

IN recent years, members and friends of the Methodist Church in the West Midlands have played a key role in CitizensUK West Midlands, a non partisan alliance of schools, churches, mosques, trade unions and community groups focused on campaigning for social justice.

Their solidarity shows that we can – and do – work together with people from all backgrounds. Social justice campaigns often take us outside of church walls to listen to the wider communities so that we speak with grounded perspectives when we engage with civic leaders.



United as citizens: the Rev Farai Mupfema (far left, bottom) with colleagues from the Roman Catholic Church, Progressive Synagogue, Newman University, Eritrean community leaders, local head teachers, University of Birmingham staff, local mosque leaders and refugee activists.

## 'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing'

AS seen on a BBC "Songs of Praise" Jazz Community Church, led by pastor Adam Sanders, was launched in April 2017, out of the successful Jazz Church project.

The focus has shifted from events and concerts, to building a community of people "improvising" life and following Jesus together.

Weekly gatherings are held at Kings Heath church, Birmingham, where the jazz plays on, not only in a musical sense... This is a place where the metaphors of jazz – inclusivity, teamwork, fresh exploration, vibrant rhythms, complex harmony, and holding tension – all apply in the understanding of living out the Christian faith.

Meeting at time to suit people with busy lives, it gathers on Sundays at 4 pm.

## Creating 'Places of Welcome' in Birmingham and beyond

PLACES of Welcome is a rapidly growing network of hospitality (there are more than 100 in the Midlands and 160 throughout the UK) run by local community groups who want to make sure that everyone has a place to go for a friendly face, a cup of tea and a conversation when they need it.

Many are hosted in Methodist churches, such as Lozells, Aldridge and Willenhall churches in the West Midlands.

West Midlands co-ordinator of Places of Welcome, Sue Ball – of St Andrews church – spoke to Mission in the Economy officer, the Rev David Butterworth, about the project.

"Is the West Midlands a welcoming region? Do you feel part of your community? Are there places in your neighbourhood where you feel wel-

come? Does your faith group or organisation offer hospitality to people in your locality?" According to Sue Ball, these are the questions that are frequently asked in conversa-



West Midlands co-ordinator of Places of Welcome Sue Ball.

tions in the social inclusion process in Birmingham. Ms Ball elaborated: "Many people in our region said 'yes', but a shocking number said they felt isolated, lonely and unwelcome. Some of these were people 'born and bred' in the region and others newcomers to it."

## Privilege

As the operations co-ordinator for the Places of Welcome network in Birmingham and the Black Country, Sue said, "It's my privilege to work alongside small community groups, including churches and other faith groups, who offer an unconditional welcome to local people for at least a few hours a week – in mosques, community centres and libraries – no agenda other than hospitality! How refreshing is that?"

It is Ms Ball's belief that "loving our neighbour" with no strings attached is at the heart of Christianity and an essential part of the DNA of Methodism". She further remarked: "One of the many joys of my work with Places of Welcome is encountering many other citizens, in different neighbourhoods, from many faith or no-faith backgrounds, who also share an aspiration to work respectfully together and take action for the common good by creating Places of Welcome: safe spaces where people feel able to connect, belong and contribute."

It is clear that Ms Ball, like many Methodist church members in the region, is out there "working" – speaking the Gospel, imitating Jesus every day.

## Conference Societies 2017

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# 'May I call you friend?' - A determination to welcome Syrian refugees to the area

THROUGH the work of CitizensUK, including listening campaigns and conversations with inter-faith partners and the Rev David Butterworth lobbying Birmingham City Council on the plight of Syrian refugees, the city eventually opened its doors to 50 people seeking asylum from the war-torn country.

Mr Butterworth had prepared a letter pleading with the council to receive at least 50 Syrian refugees – backed up by 50 community representatives who supported the motion.

Other Methodist members in the wider West Midlands, in Coventry for example, are also working with Syrian refugees. Methodists in Red-

ditch and Evesham travelled to Calais and lobbied the French Embassy in London. The Leamington Spa Methodist church has offered accommodation to the local council in Calais, thereby extending a hand of friendship.

## Challenged

As the initial 50 Syrian refugees landed in Birmingham, Mr Butterworth – while thanking the city council – again challenged their leadership.

His new proposal to city council leaders was to increase their commitment by resettling 100 more Syrian refugees each year – for five



From the left: the Rev David Butterworth, Conservative leader of Birmingham City Council Cllr Robert Alden and Labour council leader John Clancy agree to resettle 100 Syrian refugees annually for five years.

years. Cross-party support was agreed.

The Birmingham circuit has made a community room complex available to the refugees, free of charge, so

they can meet to support each other. Every Saturday, Methodists and friends meet Syrian refugees who now proudly call themselves "Syrian Brummies".

On the back of the West Midlands' welcome to Syrian refugees, local Methodists spoke with the Connexional Team, suggesting that the Methodist Church consider being the founding faith institution member of the National Refugee Welcome Board. Through this, the Methodist Church was able to help form the "Community Sponsorship" scheme with the Home Office.

## Invited

Subsequently Mr Butterworth was invited to speak in the House of Lords at the inaugural committee meeting about Community Sponsorship and the support offered

from the Methodist Church, which also encouraged other partners. Thanks to this, with Birmingham synod support, Birmingham City Council was convinced to become the first local authority in Britain to offer approval to receive a Community Sponsorship family.

Under this programme, the Methodist Church supports a family for two years and "wraps love and friendship around them" in a way similar to the Canadian model.

After many visits from, and to, the Home Office and resettlement oversight leaders, it is hoped a family of four will be housed in "ready and waiting" accommodation in the West Midlands – the first of its kind in the region.

## Building inter-faith links with West Mids mosque-twinning

"VISIT my Mosque day" saw many Methodists in Birmingham visit Clifton Road mosque, which has strong links with Syrian refugee outreach supported by the Birmingham circuit.

This year also saw the launch of the Wolverhampton and Walsall Christian-Muslim Partnership which encouraged mosques and churches to be involved in "twinning projects" to build community links.

## Friendship

These inter-faith groups meet socially throughout the year to build friendship, discover more about each other and strengthen communities in the West Midlands. The Rev Liz Dunning from the Brownhills and Willenhall circuit and the Rev Liam Dacre-Davis from the Walsall circuit have been "twinning" with Ali Akbar from the Minhaj-ul-Quran International Mosque in Walsall.

They hope to meet every four to six weeks to eat together, visit each other's places of worship and work on community projects together.

## Methodists help fight for Real Living Wage status in Birmingham

WORKING with the Living Wage Foundation, Methodists in the West Midlands helped Birmingham City Council become the first Real Living Wage City in Britain. Working tirelessly with non-partisan partners,



Lay employee Sue Ford highlighting the Living Wage Employer mark at Birmingham City Council.

Methodist lay members and staff championed the Real Living Wage, building awareness in the wider West Midlands region.

The most recent launch of the new Real Living Wage was able to include announcements from West Midlands Fire Chief Officers and West Midlands Police Commissioners – both now Real Living Wage accredited employers across the whole region.

Real Living Wage rates are calculated by the Resolution Foundation and overseen by the Living Wage Commission. In the West Midlands, Methodists have chaired Living Wage announcements in council chambers and at the headquarters of the West



The Rev Caz Haguo speaks about the Living Wage on television.

Midlands Fire Service and KPMG.

The Living Wage shows that employers, campaigners and faith groups may work

together to find practical ways to address working poverty and strengthen families, without waiting for the Government to act.

## Helping survivors of modern day slavery

ADAVU is a project of the Birmingham District which aims to tackle modern slavery head on, helping men women and children exploited for forced labour, sex work, domestic servitude or other forms of slavery.

The Adavu Aftercare Project offers long-term support and advocacy to adult survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking in the West Midlands policing area.

Since March 2016, their caseworker has supported 32 adults (30 women, two men). Common needs include help registering with a GP, accessing college, ESOL or employment programmes,



accommodation and legal support. Adavu supplies long-term support.

Although Adavu works with multiple partner agencies who provide specialist support in areas like employment training and counselling, it is one of only four such projects in the UK. The quantitative and qualitative data that it collates is there-

fore of great value in campaigning and lobbying.

Throughout the past year, Adavu has provided modern slavery and human trafficking case studies in the revised foundation Safeguarding Module, based on real case files.

Adavu is undergoing a significant transition in leadership, as Deacon Kerry Scarlett – who has led the project for the past five years – moves to a different role in the Adavu management team. A new project manager has been appointed to continue to enable the work of Adavu to grow and the survivors it works with to flourish.

## The rural chaplaincy that is transcending church walls

RURAL chaplaincy is a long-standing ministry in the heart of the country, operating from the leafy lanes of Warwickshire – in the Birmingham District – to the Wolverhampton District and the Diocese of Hereford and the Borderlands Rural Chaplaincy (BRC). The BRC is an ecumenically supported and managed "church without walls" engaging with rural communities to offer confidential support ranging from a listening ear to advocacy, networking and practical on-farm assistance.

This can take the form of anything from a one-off phone call offering farmers financial advice and support

to ongoing pastoral care.

Since the inception of the scheme, Borderlands chaplains have helped hundreds of individuals and families through difficult situations such as animal disease, family problems, mental ill-health and managing the demands of farming processes.

## Trust

Rural chaplaincy requires trust to be established between two sets of people: members of the farming community and agencies who can signpost people to the chaplaincy team or be called upon to lend expertise. The BRC has to create

its own support structures, therefore it is important that chaplains are known and trusted by health professionals, statutory agencies who support farming (Environmental Health, DEFRA inspectors) and the ancillary businesses who interact with the farming community (vets, solicitors, bank managers).

The uncertainties of post-Brexit farming and the implications for business planning, together with a wide range of problems associated with people still farming well into old age, are perhaps the two most important issues facing the BRC team.