

mission matters

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FAMILY MINISTRY**

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ministry
with
dads



What does the word 'family' conjure up for you?



Over the past year we've undertaken a fascinating research project, exploring work and ministry with families. Travelling extensively across the Connexion, we met with workers to hear of their experiences. One of the many significant discoveries was that there is no single definition that fits all our experiences or ideas of what family might be. This presents challenges, but it also demonstrates the wonderful diversity of what it means to live as a household today, as parents, carers, children and young people seek to live out life together.

We're excited to launch the research report, *We are Family: the Changing Face of Family Ministry*, this coming September, and for there to be an opportunity to grapple with many of the questions and perspectives it offers. What's very clear is that the Church is seeking to be a shining light in the lives of families, providing support and care in a variety of ways.

The stories in this issue of *Mission Matters* very much reflect this: from St John's Methodist Church in Market Weighton where 'Tea and Toast' has become a firm fixture in the lives of many local families, to Bilton Area Methodist Church where offering space for dads and children is a regular highlight. Along with stories illustrating the vital importance of education and the difference it makes in young lives – there's much here that reminds us that God is at work amongst and through us.

As the pages unfold, be inspired that God continues to fashion us as family – beyond our biological ties. We are united in him. As Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." Let's celebrate and cherish this rich array as we seek to cultivate that sense of family in our communities and churches.

Gail Adcock
Church & Community
Development Officer

Haiti – five years on

An update from mission partners John and Sharon Harbottle

On 12 January 2010, a little before 5pm, life changed in this small country the size of Wales. Suddenly Haiti was on the map and money was pledged to help what was known as the "poorest nation in the Western world". The catalogue of disasters, including retention of



*Mission partners
John and Sharon Harbottle*

money by the international community, sporadic assistance from many aid agencies and other evidence, is well documented. Lessons have been learned that will shape future disaster response.

The earthquake is rarely spoken of by local people. The commemoration area at the mass grave bears a marker but has not yet been developed despite plans being made public. The emphasis is on the living, whether they are those in a hand to mouth existence, earning less than \$2 a day, or others who are just grateful to be alive. Everyone suffered loss. Everyone gets on with life in some way.

The Haitian people have resumed buying and selling on the streets, sheltering in precarious buildings, moving from tents to wooden houses and then onto more permanent homes as they have become available. To all intents and purposes you would hardly know the earthquake occurred. Bank holidays are celebrated in style. The president is on the streets singing and dancing with the crowd and life goes

on. At present the centre of the capital city of Port au Prince is a place of contrasts. Some old buildings that survived the tremors are being taken down. New government and ministry buildings are rising. Areas are being cleared for

the redevelopment of the city for the future and billboards display the plans for all to see. Progress is steady. Some would like it to be faster, but until the government receives the promised international donations, tensions will remain, questions will be asked and demonstrations will occur on the streets.

Daily we are delighted to see roads resurfaced, pavements constructed and markets thriving. We continue to be amazed at the resilience of the people and count it as a privilege to be working alongside them.

ACT NOW

Thank you for your generous giving to the Haiti appeal which raised over £500,000. Donate to the World Mission Fund and help us to respond to emergency situations in communities wherever the need is greatest. Go to www.justgiving.com/mcfworldmission/donate and be a part of this today. Thank you.

Front cover picture: Family at St John's Methodist Church, Market Weighton

Reaching out...



This picture: Wrapping chocolate treats as gifts. Below right: Getting creative, thinking what am I good at?

How often do we stop to consider how difficult it can be for someone to set foot through the doors of a church for the very first time?

Do we truly understand how it feels for the newcomer turning up to their first Sunday service? Will we ever fully empathise with the person who is wondering about giving church “another go”, following a previous negative experience?

I have to admit it wasn't until three years ago that I began to comprehend how challenging this might be. In conversations with some of the parents attending our weekly toddler group (or bringing their children for baptism), we noticed that while they seemed genuinely interested in church and exploring faith, they were reluctant to come along on a Sunday morning. The need for us as a church to offer a 'halfway' meeting point – and, where we could, to encourage people who were starting out on a journey of faith – became very apparent.

In the summer of 2012, we launched a series of five evening sessions called *Intro*: an introduction to faith and to life. Each session provided an opportunity for

people to explore and ask questions about a relationship with God. Each week we had homemade cakes, biscuits and fresh coffee, and explored different aspects of the life of our church.

There was an introduction to Junior Church and how it operates, while another member of the church shared information about the parenting and marriage courses we offer. A subsequent session looked at how we support the local and wider community, as well as the invaluable support offered to those who are experiencing the everyday struggles in life such as unemployment, relationship breakdowns, illness and bereavement. At each session, a different member of the church spoke about their journey of faith, and how they had discovered God.

In recent weeks we have felt very blessed as a church to welcome a group of people into membership. There is no question that both time and patience and complete and utter trust in God's hand in this work are required in waiting to see if the tiny



All photos: © Jo Fletcher

seeds which are sown will bear fruit. We are so encouraged that we have begun to see in this work that as we sow and encourage steps of growth, God does indeed provide the harvest.

Jo Fletcher, children's and family worker, Bramhall Methodist Church

PRAY NOW 🙏

Please pray for children and family workers across the Connexion. To support their work donate now via www.justgiving.com/missioninbritain/donate or via the enclosed giving form. Thank you.

Young mums standing outside in the rain near the church talking together

Market Weighton

Tea and toast

Photo: © Thinkstock 2015

In 2008, the **Revd Sue Pegg** arrived in her new role as minister at St John's Methodist Church in Market Weighton, East Yorkshire. At that point the church had a worshipping congregation of about 20 (mainly retired) and there were no children or families attending regularly, but there was a hope to work more closely with parents and children.

"A small group of people had a vision of opening up to the community in some way once building renovations were complete," Sue says. "This group prayerfully set about planning a way forward. We began to listen to the needs of the locals."

One church member noticed some young mums standing outside in the rain near the church talking together after dropping their little ones off at school. She asked them, "If we put cups of tea on in church, would you come?" One mum answered, "If you put toast on too, we'd definitely come!" And so the Tea and Toast project on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings came into fruition.

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Six years on, Tea and Toast now hosts up to 50 young families. As Sue explains, "We are open 50 weeks of the year and the project has many connections around town. The Sure Start Toy Library visits monthly. The local health visitor often suggests that post-natal mums meet together at Tea and Toast. The school

visitor brings in parents from the outlying villages who are feeling isolated and the community police sometimes hold a surgery during the morning."

They've also seen some families become involved in the church. "Some come to our special Sunday service once a month," says Sue. "Others have asked for their babies to be baptized while others are keen for their little ones who are approaching school age to join our Boys' Brigade group – which has quadrupled in number over the last six years."

The church has also been able to support families in other ways. At Harvest time,



Photo: © Revd. Sue Pegg

the church gave groceries away to a variety of charities and noticed that some young families were struggling financially as the recession took hold. "A few years ago we decided on the Great Harvest Giveaway," Sue explains. "The week after Harvest, we parcelled up the produce and gave every person who came through our doors a carrier bag full of food. They were told that if they needed it, they could keep it; if not, they were to give it away to someone who did." The church has built on this initiative by hosting events during school holidays such as a pancake party, a beach party and a 'sparkle and light' party – all completely free for families.

This emphasis on family ministry and support has had a wider impact on St John's with the congregation tripling in size and the building opening five or six days every week. Sue believes this is where God intended the church to be. "With God's help, we have put the church back as part of the community," she says. "Most people in the town now know where the Methodist Church is, and that a warm welcome awaits them there."

Above: Fun with friends and family at Tea and Toast

This picture: Tea and toast at Holiday at Holme



Photo: © Thinkstock 2015

*Thank you for your eternal love of us
Thank you for mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters,
Grandparents, cousins, sons, daughters
For all those who care and love
And create family where maybe it
Has been absent.
Give us all a heart to serve, love and cherish
our family
As you have loved us.*

PRAY NOW 🙏

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonder of family – a place that brings us joy and hope, laughter and kindness, yet also sometimes difficulty and frustration, heartache and worry.

Let's hear it for the 'Granny Graduate'!

Last November, 71-year-old Moka Jessop Togakilo received her Certificate in Theological Studies from Pacific Theological College in Fiji. Mission partner Val Ogden interviewed the 'Granny Graduate' for *Mission Matters*.



Moka Jessop Togakilo with Salome Kolouniviti

Photo: © Val Ogden

Q Could you tell us about your church and the work you do there?

My church is called Ekalesia Kelisiano Niue (EKN) and that's where I'm an ordained elder; the word we use is *ulumutua*. I suppose you could say I'm the pastor's 'right-hand woman', but actually we have no pastor. I have pastoral charge of the church in a village called Toi, and it's coming up to my tenth year of being ordained.

Q Did studying theology at a distance really help you in that ministry? Does it equip you for the work 'on the ground'?

Yes! The courses have proved to me

that what I'm doing is of God. It's very important for me to have theological education because otherwise people think the only real pastors – the only ones who know anything – are those who've been to college full-time. It's hard in our church for women leaders to be recognised and I often think of Paul and his times of misery and persecution. I have known those times too. But they have made me rely on God even more.

It's hard in our church for women leaders to be recognised and I often think of Paul and his times of misery and persecution.

Q Can you think of a particular topic or assignment in your studies which really gripped you and got you thinking?

Yes; it was in the Biblical Studies course when we looked at the story of Rahab. I was thinking about her being called a prostitute and how negative that is. But if we are Christians and look more deeply, we see how she performed to save Israel

from the hands of her enemies by hiding the spies. It annoys me that she's labelled, and as I was studying, I was thinking, "In any new translation of the Bible, will there be a change in that word 'prostitute'?" I think there should be. You can't look down on your sisters because that's the past – the old life.

Studying helps you to develop your spiritual side. It's very educational and it applies to your own life and you become a different person. We have old habits and old ways of looking at things. The courses are organized in a way that helps you go forward – they inspire you. That's why I'm studying in the extension programme. I didn't do it just to prove I'm a pastor – though you can't deny that was part of it. The best part is to know God more and to be a better follower of Jesus day by day.

ACT NOW

Thank you for your generous support of the World Mission Fund which supports mission partners and provides grants for Partner Churches overseas. Go to www.justgiving.com/mcfworldmission/donate and be a part of this today. Thank you.



Mission partner Val Ogden

A hope and future for the deaf children of Kenya

In the Tharaka district of eastern Kenya, a disproportionately high number of children are either severely or profoundly deaf, due to a high prevalence of cerebral malaria and meningitis.

The Methodist Church in Kenya recognised the need for these children to be educated – and so in January 2006, Helen Moorehead (a mission partner from the Methodist Church in Ireland) was invited to start a school for the deaf in Tharaka.

The Kamatungu School for the Deaf is now government registered; it has almost 70 pupils and is growing. There are two boys' dormitories and one girls' dormitory, which is now full. Staff members have been busy fundraising and applying for government grants to build a new dormitory to accommodate a new intake of girls expected this year. So far, they have raised half of the £30,000 needed to build the new dormitory.

"It has been a privilege to be involved in setting up the school for the deaf at Kamatungu and through the support and prayers of friends at home to be able to give these children hope and a future," Helen said. "Even now we are working with the school as we plan the way forward for those first children into the school, who are now ready to leave and move to High School or vocational training.

"However it has not been all giving. I received such a lot from the children; they were loving, affectionate, caring and appreciative. I shall always value the wonderful years we spent together."



ABOVE: Last April, poor rainfall led to drought in parts of Kenya, including Tharaka. Many of the families of children attending the Kamatungu School had to sell their goats to buy food. Friends from Ireland sent money to the neediest families so that they could buy goats and build up their herds again. At the end of the school term, the children took the goats home.

Below: Staff distribute new uniforms to pupils who were so excited they put them on straight away.

"It has been a privilege to be involved in setting up the school for the deaf at Kamatungu and through the support and prayers of friends at home to be able to give these children hope and a future."



PRAY NOW

Please pray for Partner Churches in Ireland and around the world enabling projects like these to be funded.

“Family’ is everyone”

Claire Knight, Youth & Family worker for Wokingham Methodist Church, tells *Mission Matters* about her work.

I used to work for a local charity running work experience and business enterprise activities within schools, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I was also increasingly undertaking responsibility for some of the youth and children's ministry in the Anglican church I attended, running holiday clubs, Junior Church and various other projects with children and young people. The office where I was working was closing, which presented me with an opportunity to look for alternative employment. At that very moment, Wokingham Methodist Church advertised a vacancy for a youth worker. I was approached to apply and the rest, as they say, is history!

I have learnt a phenomenal amount through my work with families. But a couple of things have really stood out for me. The first is: Never give up! When you start something new like a Messy Church service, it can take a while to grow to more than a handful of people. I have learnt that this is ok.

The second thing is that 'family' is everyone – from the grannies and grandpas right down to the babies. We are all a Church family, so I am passionate about doing things which try to engage everyone. I have also learnt not to underestimate the power of young and old learning together. My own children have no grandfathers, and it has been amazing to see the

relationships they have built with members of our congregation who are older. I think this is really powerful in encouraging children and youth to feel a sense of belonging.

One of my key pieces of work is our 'Mind the Gap' project which I run with our schools workers. We work with Year 6s as they prepare and move on to secondary school. That work is so valuable and is a prime example of journeying with young people. I have been working on the project for four years now and have seen those first Year 6 pupils grow and flourish and they still come to my youth café now as Year 10s.

As I have already said, 'family' is everyone. However, I do feel that family work – of any sort – is not a quick winning role. We are building relationships that last. Children are no fools and it can take time for you to gain their trust and respect.

The biggest issue for me is that some churches employ a family worker and see that as an end to all of their worries! In many ways this is the case – but a really great family worker will expand the church's work, so there will inevitably be lots of new ideas and, hopefully, more families. Support with prayer and money is great, but a family worker cannot do it on their own and needs a passionate team of volunteers and experience to support their work.

Prayers for the family

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the wonder of family –
a place that brings us joy and hope,
laughter and kindness,
yet also sometimes difficulty and
frustration,
heartache and worry.*

*Father would you dwell
at the heart of all families?
As they seek to live life with one another
give them love and patience
guide them in their lives together
sustain them when life is challenging
rejoice with them when life is good
and forever be the firm foundation
on which they can trust.*

*Lord God
be present throughout the seasons of
family life
with families experiencing change
for parents with newborn babies
in homes where children are growing,
leaving home, creating families of their
own
for those caring for elderly relatives
be a source of strength, wisdom and
encouragement we pray.
Support and encourage them as life alters
and build them up
keeping strong ties and bonds
between all those
being family together.*

Penalising the people who most need help

By Anna Drew

Just before Christmas I met Graham. As the Church's lead media officer I had been working with the Joint Public Issues Team on a campaign about benefit sanctions. Being sanctioned means having your benefit payments stopped for a period of up to three years – usually because you haven't complied with the conditions set out by the Jobcentre.

We knew sanctions were hitting the most vulnerable people in society the hardest – and that they're one of the reasons for the increase in UK foodbank use. But we also knew that none of that would mean anything without the real stories of people who are being affected by sanctions – we wanted their voices to be heard.

And that's how I came to meet Graham, at my local Trussell Trust foodbank in Medway. He's a qualified electrician, trained to work on high voltage power lines. In fact, it turns out that he probably worked with my father-in-law for one of the major electricity companies.

But that was before he had a massive car accident and broke his neck. By the time he was well enough to work the recession had hit and there were no jobs, so he began to claim Jobseeker's Allowance.

Then he had an offer of work, so he informed the Jobcentre that he would no longer need JSA. But it turned out that there was no job. When he went to claim JSA again he discovered that he had been sanctioned for 16 weeks for not turning up to a Jobcentre meeting in the period in which he was not claiming benefits.

When I met him, Graham was appealing the decision. In the meantime, he couldn't afford gas or electricity and, although he qualified for a hardship payment, he would receive nothing for a further two weeks. He was relying on foodbanks to stay alive.

He was still expected to continue to look for work. I know the kind of blokes that work on the electricity lines – physically fit, but slightly rounded from the habitual fry-ups, full of humour, banter and life.

Graham was a ghost – grey hair, grey skin, too slim to be healthy and so quietly spoken I couldn't always understand him. Crushed by the system, consumed with just staying alive.

I asked him what Christmas would look like for him. "Bleak," he said.

Since meeting Graham I have collected more than 100 stories like his – stories that tell of a dysfunctional and inhuman system that penalises the people who most need its help. What I discovered – and what countless Methodists across Britain are discovering through their work with the poorest in our communities – is that Graham's story is appallingly not at all unusual.

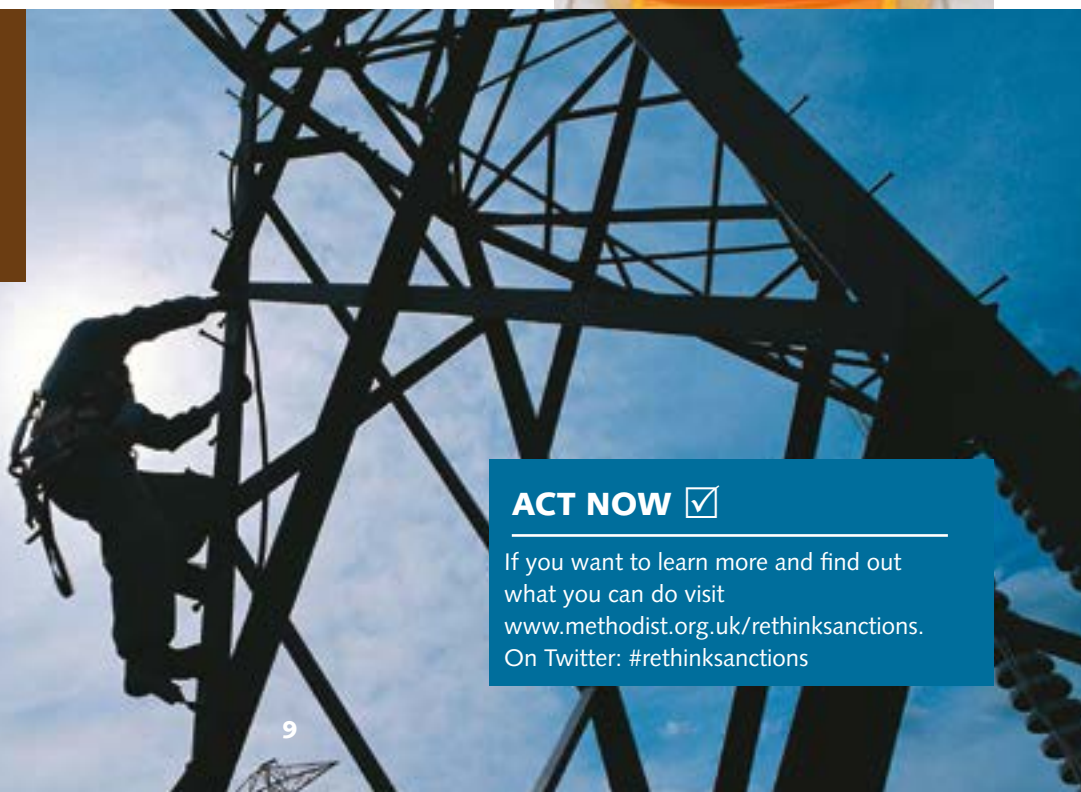
This is why the Methodist Church, together with its ecumenical partners, is urgently calling on the government to rethink sanctions.



Benefit sanctions

Both photos: © Thinkstock 2015

Graham is a qualified electrician, trained to work on high voltage power lines.



ACT NOW ✓

If you want to learn more and find out what you can do visit www.methodist.org.uk/rethinksanctions. On Twitter: #rethinksanctions



Dynamic ministry with dads

Working with dads is increasingly becoming an area of focus for many lay workers. The tradition of mother-and-toddler groups has shifted so that more now welcome dads who are keen to enjoy time with their young children.

Matthew Lunn, Children & Family worker for the Methodist Church in Harrogate & Knaresborough, has specifically developed his role to work with fathers. Alongside the main aspects of his role in Sunday School and local schools he has had the opportunity to engage with dads, particularly in Messy Church.

I have many conversations with dads in church about their week at work or at home looking after the kids," he says, "and one of the many things I like talking to them about is football. I find the sport helps to engage people, especially dads."

This led Matt to start a pub church for parents where the majority of people who attend are dads. As he explains, "Meeting in a pub can help dads to open up in an environment they're used to. It's church, but in a pub where people can enjoy a pint!"

Befriending fathers in this way has led to some fantastic relationships, which Matt finds hugely satisfying. "I get a buzz seeing dads feeling more relaxed and start to open up because they feel they belong," he says. One family decided to get their child baptized following a significant upset in their life, and are now part of the church. At the baptism, the child's father said, "I used to think the church was an old dusty building, but now I see the building as our church."

Finding ways to support dads better is very much on Matt's mind, and he is keen for the church to find ways to help them belong. "We want to encourage dads to identify with belonging to a church because it could lead them to believe in something greater than a football team!" he says. "The church needs to be on the terraces not the changing rooms! Dads need to see people caring and supporting them and I think the church can be fantastic at this!"



Both photos: © Thinkstock 2015

"One of the many things I like talking to them about is football. I find the sport helps to engage people, especially dads."

Mark Chester, founder of Who Let the Dads Out?, agrees with Matt's sentiments. "It's vital for us as churches to reach out to fathers, father figures and their children if we want to see faith in God passed from one generation to the next," he says.

"This was one of the key purposes of creating Who Let the Dads Out? It provides a great opportunity to get to know dads and their children, and to begin to make friendships and share God's love with them. It strengthens families, supports communities and is helping lead people to God."



Spring is in the air

Christmas and New Year might seem like ages ago – especially since we've just reflected on the tenth anniversary of the tsunami in South East Asia and the fifth anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti.

We are well and truly into the first quarter of 2015. Eagerly we look forward to a fruitful year of partnerships with churches not just in Britain but across the world.

Whether it's an emergency overseas or supporting mission work here in Britain, Methodist people everywhere generously and prayerfully enable such vital work to happen. Thank you very much.

Your donations, however small, provide countless opportunities for meeting and encountering God. Lives are changed and touched in countless ways that words cannot describe. This quarter we are looking forward to receiving donations for the 2014 Advent Offering which will be supporting mission based projects all over Britain.

Advent Offering shared one story of the great work being done with refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Raheela and her family have settled in well and as she says, "When you're part of a church, you have a family behind you ... where there is hope, you learn that in patience and in waiting, it becomes easier." If you have not yet done so, please send in your donation soon so that we can start putting it to good use.

The World Mission Fund has just allocated £7,500 to the Methodist Church in Benin to help the church continue its Christian radio broadcasting after a serious fire in

the studio. Thankfully no one was hurt in the fire but all the equipment was destroyed. Without this emergency grant the radio station would be forced to stop broadcasting and would lose its operator's licence.

It is people that develop relationships and key to this work are Mission Partners. By providing specialist skills that are not available locally, Mission Partners live out their Gospel calling to share their faith through their work, actions and love for those they serve. Elena, a physiotherapist, has recently started work in Rwanda with disabled children giving them not just needed medical care but also a real hope for the future. Please help us continue to support Elena and other Mission Partners. It is your regular giving which makes a real difference to people's lives.

Please continue to support the work of various funds such as the Mission in Britain Fund, the World Mission Fund and the Methodist Church Fund by making a donation as a church or individual. You can donate by sending a cheque payable to the relevant fund to the Fundraising Manager, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

The Fundraising Officer provides fundraising advice and guidance through various options available to churches. To find out more about any of these funds, please send an email to fundraising@methodistchurch.org.uk and we will be happy to help you.

Thank you for your ongoing support to our much needed missions work across the Connexion. Please keep our giving in your prayers so that all we do, is done to the glory of God.



Devastation following the earthquake in Haiti



Hope makes the patience of waiting easier



New life after tsunami disaster, ten years on

PRAY NOW

Donate now to one of our funds or via the enclosed giving form. Thank you.

THANK YOU for your generous giving

Share the **Gift of Easter** with your community

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Bring reconciliation and healing this Easter

The Easter Offering 2015 dedication service draws inspiration from the prophetic visions, in the Old and New Testaments, of the Tree of Life producing leaves for healing.

This act of worship enables the Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland to give to the work of the 65 Partner Churches around the world. The service has been prepared by the Methodist Women in Britain.

To hold an Easter Offering service in your church or circuit, visit www.methodist.org.uk/easteroffering where you will find more information including the free-to-download worship materials.

The leaves of the tree...



Easter Offering 2015



The **Methodist** Church 