
Our commitment to care for others, particularly those on the edge, is a fundamental part of our faith, not an optional extra.

And being unstained by the world has to be more than a rule based faith, whether the old Methodist ways of teetotalism and not doing anything but church on Sundays, or the ways of the Pharisees in the gospel reading.

In some ways a rule based religion is easier, but from our gospel reading and our Methodist tradition we know faith is about a change of heart, leading to a change of lifestyle, not simple obedience to a rulebook.

But we then have to return to our initial question: What is a Christian way of life? What is distinctive about our personal lives, and what is distinctive about the church that makes it different from the beekeeping society?

In the last couple of years, the Methodist Church has been looking at the question of a Methodist way of life and on the front page of this leaflet you have the simple framework that has been developed. It is not complicated, but it is a clear reminder, and although quite gentle, I find it profoundly challenging. I have put it up on my office wall, and try and refer to it daily, and I pray that it makes a difference.

I think what makes it a Methodist way of life, is the second page This is a series of questions, both to ask ourselves privately, but particularly to share in groups with others.

In our Methodist tradition, John Wesley said there is no holiness, but social holiness. Holiness was

Wesley's way of talking about what a Christian way of life should be, and the Methodist way of life is really a description of what Wesley thought of as holiness, spiritual and practical, personal gospel and social gospel all integrated together. And Wesley said that there is no holiness but social holiness. By that he did not mean the social gospel, he meant that the journey to holiness is not something we can do on our own. We have to do it together in fellowship. That is why his societies had house groups, classes or bands as they were called, where they asked each other questions like those on the second page.

If we are to be a distinct community of followers of Jesus, I believe it is just as important that we come together in groups to look at questions like these that can help us grow in faith in Jesus and its practical outworking as it is to run our buildings. It will give us the reason and the spiritual resources we need to function as churches in today's challenging world.

The strap line for the vision of the Birmingham Methodist District is: to be a growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking and inclusive church without walls.

I pray that we can as individuals and church communities, develop a way of life that opens us to God's love and grace, that anchors us in the way of Jesus, and that is inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I hope this Methodist way of life can be an aid to that. I believe with that commitment God will open up for us new and exciting ways of following Jesus and being his community in the world, that will bless us, and those we serve in his name.

Circuit Service for Coventry and Nuneaton

A Methodist Way of Life

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

As far as we are able, with God's help:

Worship

- We will pray daily.
- We will worship with others regularly.
- We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.

Learning and Caring

- We will care for ourselves and those around us.
- We will learn more about our faith.
- We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Service

- We will help people in our communities and beyond.
- We will care for creation and all God's gifts.
- We will challenge injustice.

Evangelism

- We will speak of the love of God.
- We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus.
- We will share our faith with others.

**May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church,
for the transformation of the world.**

A Methodist Way of Life

A Methodist Way of Life encourages us to grow together.
Make time to discuss these questions regularly with others.

Worship

- What is the pattern of your prayer life?
- How easy or hard do you find it to pray?
- What has spoken to you recently in worship or in the Bible?
- When, lately, have you felt close to God or distant from God?

Learning and Caring

- How have you practised generosity since we last met?
- How have you shown hospitality to others recently?
- How are you caring for yourself?
- How and what are you learning now?

Service

- How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond? What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?
- How are you caring for God's creation?
- How are you using God's gifts (including your financial resources)?
- What issues of injustice are you currently concerned about? What are you doing in response?

Evangelism

- When was the last time you were able to talk about God?
- What opportunities to share your faith have there been since we last met?
- How have you responded to opportunities to share your faith?
- Is there anyone you might invite to consider Christian faith?

How can we support each other in our Way of Life commitments?

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A Christian Way of life?

Readings:

James 1: 17 - 27

Mark 7: 1 - 8, 14 - 15, 21 - 23

Suggested hymns:

StF 454: Be thou my vision

StF 508: Purify my heart

StF 498: God of all power and truth and grace

StF 693: Beauty for brokenness

A prayer of approach

Unchanging God,
refresher, healer and restorer,
give us wisdom and discernment today.
We come to seek you and to hear you,
to be still and present with you,
to be transformed. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Unblemished God, forgive us
when we adhere to laws that are not of you,
when we criticise others because their ways are not our
ways.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have not supported one another in love,
or protected those that are vulnerable.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have corrupted your laws and gone our own
way,
or when we have not nurtured those in our families
and communities and let them go astray.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

Help us to live as one community,
bound together in love and grace.
Help us to live alongside each other
and be there for one another.
Amen.

Reflection

What is a Christian way of life?

How is we different from those around us who do not
profess any faith?

Does the church function or behave in any different way
from a secular organisation?

As we come back after the pandemic, I am led to the
question, how can my life, how can our church, really
reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ, being good news to
us, and through us to our community and the wider
world.

Our readings today challenge me. I am reminded of the
phrase: 'If you were put on trial for being a Christian,
would there be enough evidence to convict you?' And
likewise for our churches, the challenge: 'If your church
were to close, who other than the members, and those
who rent the premises for secular purposes, would
notice?'

James says in our reading: 'be doers of the word, and
not merely hearers who deceive themselves.' And again:
'religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the
Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their
distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.'