

Our commitment across Tynedale is to see vibrant Christian communities which introduce people to life in the Kingdom of God and help people to live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Through its extensive range of regular and occasional activities, Tynedale Methodist Circuit continues to serve God and his people. The following examples of our work are far from exhaustive! It would be impossible to reference all the benefit that flows from our churches.

Across the Circuit there is regular and consistent investment in spiritual and social capital through meetings for worship and fellowship. Here, amidst this beautiful part of the world, we cultivate and celebrate a sense of wonder and awe. Week by week, we proclaim God's Good News and respond by loving God and by loving our fellow human beings. We inspire, encourage and sustain values shaped by love and generosity. We pray regularly for our local communities, for individuals in them and for the world. We offer pastoral support to people in many ways, including visiting, the development of meaningful friendship and 'occasional offices'.

We aim for our worship to be vibrant, reflecting the glory and the grace of God. It is open to all and is augmented with festival services held throughout the year. In addition to Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, many of our churches have significant harvest celebrations. We serve the needs of our communities by providing baptisms, weddings and funerals. Countless midweek fellowship groups meet in homes or churches to provide nurture, teaching and encouragement.

The Circuit meets in 20 congregations spread across nearly 2,000 square miles. We are working to reverse numerical decline, to lower the age profile of our membership and to sustain ministry lay and ordained. The Circuit agreed a new mission statement in the spring of 2017, from which we subsequently identified 3 areas of priority to ensure the future health and growth of the Circuit. These are:

- Enhancing the quality of our worship services
- Developing small groups for learning together, pastoral support and prayer
- Building confidence in sharing our faith with others.

We continue to hold to these priorities. In addition, every church has also been required by the Methodist Church to produce either a 'Growth Plan' or an 'End of Life Plan'. We have used this requirement as leverage and in many places it has focussed energy and given new purpose; it is not coincidental that several congregations have made new members this year, some of them for the first time in several years.

Much of the area we serve is remote rural countryside, where loneliness and isolation are particular issues, but we also minister in a range of urban communities. In the urban areas our churches have multiple opportunities to serve and in smaller communities like Kielder and Allendale our presence is often invaluable as a centre and focus of the community. Riding Mill is a typical example: here, the congregation work closely with the Parish Cafe and organise the Lunch Club and Macmillan coffee morning, and their premises are used as a meeting place for the local Drama Club and the Tyne Valley Youth Theatre. They also provide a venue for the Choral Society.

In many places across the Circuit churches are providing drop-ins, coffee mornings and/or lunches for the community, contributing to community cohesion and easing loneliness. For example, at Haltwhistle the chapel is the focus for a weekly coffee morning attended by over 100 people, alongside weekly community Drop-in for senior citizens and monthly meetings of the Men's Forum. We employ a community worker in Haltwhistle, who is supporting and extending our outreach

there. In Hexham, Trinity's weekly coffee morning and West End's monthly CAMEO both provide opportunities for people to socialise together. Corbridge has a weekly coffee morning, inviting all the community to enjoy fellowship, conversation, and excellent scones, as well as the monthly 'Wednesday Forum' and 'Knit & Natter'. Bellingham's weekly and Acomb's and Allendale's monthly coffee mornings also provide important places for people to meet and socialise in their communities. In other small communities, such as Barrasford, such events are less frequent but no less valued by all who attend. Catton's monthly lunch club also provides a much-appreciated social opportunity, and their weekly computer-support group provides invaluable help in a rural context.

In Bellingham and the North Tyne valley, the Deacon appointed to minister in this section has used her creative gifts and pastoral qualities to encourage and support isolated communities. The church at Falstone/Kielder also provides a youth drop-in and Messy Church in a remote area with few facilities. Stocksfield church hosts a monthly film night which is well attended by growing numbers from the church and the community.

Our churches are regularly involved in supporting good causes through collections of money and by donating goods. For example, in the weeks before Christmas several churches collect toys for the Salvation Army and Operation Christmas Child for distribution to children in the UK and abroad. Many churches are collection points for their local Foodbank. Some have made donations of money, food and goods to Stopgap (a local organisation working with homeless and vulnerable people).

Our premises are also a substantial community asset, being well used by groups from the community as well as by churches – the WI in Bellingham and Haltwhistle, for example, and parent & toddler groups in Hexham. Some of our external users also use our premises to raise funds for themselves and for others.

Churches continue to seek new ways of expressing worship in addition to inherited modes of church. Messy Churches operate (usually in partnership with other denominations) in the Allen Valley, Corbridge, Haltwhistle, Haydon Bridge, Prudhoe, Slaley, Stocksfield and Wylam. Several churches offer Café worship and Haltwhistle hosts a monthly midweek 'Breakfast Worship'. Also midweek, Hexham West End offers informal worship and monthly reflective communion services.

Ministers and lay people are involved in local schools across the area through taking assemblies and lessons, and a number of schools and playgroups use our churches for festivals, particularly in the lead-up to Christmas and Easter. Members of several churches deliver 'Open the Book' assemblies in local schools; these have been remarkably well received and there is a demand from the schools for more.

There are many volunteers working with children and young people, as well as employed lay staff in Hexham, Haltwhistle, Prudhoe and Stocksfield. At Haydon Bridge, innovative work is also taking place with children and families through ministry with puppets, and up to 80 children / parents / grandparents gather for these special times.

Churches reach out also to housebound people and to those in residential care, with regular visiting and several services taking place in residential homes in Hexham, Corbridge and Haydon Bridge for the benefit of residents.

There are countless ways in which churches and individuals seek to build bridges with the wider community. Trinity give out mince pies at Hexham Christmas fair. Acomb has a ladies' choir (consisting of ladies from other churches and non-church members) which gives concerts throughout the area.

Relations with other churches are good, with active collaboration in the North Tyne valley where we have a number of joint Methodist/URC enterprises and where we provide ministry into URC churches. Wherever possible, churches work closely together across the denominations in our towns and villages. In Wark the Methodist/URC congregation has recently vacated the chapel and

re-launched in the Town Hall: a more comfortable, flexible and accessible building from which to minister. This has also helped to develop relations with the Church of England in the village.

The ordained ministerial team is strong, positive, gifted and enthusiastic. It contains a wealth of experience and complementary talents and works well together. We are heavily dependent on the work of lay people at every level and it's safe to say that everything in the Circuit is a collaborative venture involving lay and ordained. As Superintendent I wish to thank all for faithfully playing their parts and giving of their prayers, time, money and enthusiasm, without which this wonderful work would not be possible.

Revd Paul Dunstan

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