

DIGITAL OUTREACH WORKER

After the resignation of the Children and Family Worker the church Council reviewed the situation and after a period of prayerful reflection decided to seek to appoint someone with a wider 'brief' to be known as an Outreach Worker.

After advertising the post twice we have not been able to appoint and this expresses the difficulty of making appointments during the lockdown, especially for a role that included activities in a building that was closed for longer than expected.

However, in October the Council agreed to appoint a Digital Outreach Worker for ten hours a week. The job has been advertised and we hope to appoint in early December. The person will focus on the growing presence the church has on line, particularly with people who would not feel comfortable in coming to the building.

Please pray for this process, that the right person might apply and be appointed.

Sarah Sheppard

written by her daughter Ruth Martin.

Sarah Sheppard, who celebrated her 100th birthday on 20th July, has lived in Westfield since 1988. Born in Ballydehob, West Cork, Ireland, into a loving farming family, the Roycrofts, there was no electricity, running water, phones, vehicles or modern devices. Walking three miles to school in the village and helping with the milking before school was normal. Her mother was tiny and had 4 children when aged between 38 and 43. The family were committed members of Ballydehob Methodist Church and attended several times each Sunday. Sarah remembers evangelistic tent meetings held in local farmers' fields; her grandfathers used to try to outdo each other singing Moody and Sankey hymns.

Sarah realised that if she didn't want to marry a farmer, she would need to leave home. She managed to get a job in the UK in 1938 and then decided she wanted to train as a nurse. A month before war broke out she began her nurses training in Wimbledon Hospital. She remembers sleeping on the top floor of the nurses' home and having to bring her mattress

downstairs when the air raid siren went off (and dragging it back up again in the morning).

These were harsh times to train, £26 a year wages, working all day and studying in the evening. One trip back home a year. If your cap was a tiny bit askew you would be in big trouble with Matron. They were dealing with many war wounds and people injured from bombing raids over London. Sarah loved nursing and did very well; she loved the sense of comradeship and especially enjoyed working in Theatre. She remembers going to the Albert Hall in the mid-1940s and being very impacted by evangelist Tom Rees, going forward at one meeting.

After a few years she trained as a midwife in London towards the end of the war. She was outside Buckingham Palace on VE day and remembers the crowds and the joy.

A stint as a midwife and District Nurse in Studley, Warwickshire, followed, where they would regularly deliver several babies at home every day; one Christmas day she and her colleagues delivered seven babies and hosted a Christmas dinner with various "waifs and strays" including German PoWs. She was a member of Studley Methodist Church. In 1950, Sarah came back to London, to Poplar in the East End (of "Call the Midwife" fame.) She worked at Poplar Hospital as a Ward Sister for two years before training as a Health Visitor.

Sarah has always had a strong Christian faith which is the cornerstone of her life. She met Albert Sheppard, her future husband, at Poplar Methodist Church (known as Lax's after the minister, the Reverend William Lax, who was also Mayor of Poplar for many years.) She and Albert were very active members of the Church for many years. They were also involved as volunteers at the Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest, a Methodist charity for seamen in Poplar. They spent many a Christmas day volunteering at the "Queen Vic" where their son, Phil was Deputy Manager. Sarah was always involved as a volunteer at Billy Graham events and Luis Palau's mission in the 1980s.

Two children were born in the mid to late fifties, Ruth and Phil. When they were older, Sarah returned to work as a Health Visitor and ended her career as a Nursing Officer, in charge of a clinic of several health Visitors in London's East End.

Ruth had moved to Bath and after marrying another Phil, they moved to Westfield. Sarah and Albert moved to Longfellow Road in 1988 to be available to Ruth and her family. They joined Midsomer Norton Methodist Church and have been valued members. Albert died in 2008 at the grand age of 96. Sarah is now registered blind, but continues to be a loved and cherished member of her family and community.



My 1st Year At University

Ellie Knight

I am now in my second year at Edge Hill University studying Childhood and Youth Studies. The university is in a small village called Ormskirk and is only 25 minutes away from Liverpool city centre – meaning there is lots to keep me busy (despite all the current restrictions!!) Last year I studied topics such as the history of childhood, current and past laws and policies for children and child psychology. Although studying this year is 90% online, I'm still looking forward to studying and securing the grades I hope to achieve. During my first year, I made lots of friends on my course but also through attending Christian union. Our Christian union meets every Thursday night for group worship and some Saturday nights for a social evening such as pizza and movie night or a games night (which are now all virtual, of course!) Even though my studying is online, I am able to keep myself busy with my part time job at Waitrose and things such as walking our two dogs, Benji and Otis, at the beach!



Sarah Moore

My first year of university was most definitely an interesting one. I chose to study Zoology with Entomology at Harper Adams University. For those wondering, entomology is the study of insects, which is what I am most interested in. Unfortunately, in the first year, the study of insects wasn't really covered, as the first year covers more of the zoology side and aims to get all of the students at the same level of understanding. However, I am looking forward to second year which starts in October because insects will be included more, including two modules specifically on insects! I am really excited for those modules when I start uni again.

I am very thankful to God and to everyone that has prayed for me as I have had a really good start to university life and I also have an amazing friendship group. We are a group of 10 entomologists, including myself and we get on really well. Along with being great friends we also help each other to ID various insects and also help with assignments.

I have really enjoyed the different aspects of my degree so far which includes things such as dissections and practicals in the labs. Especially looking at different parasites using microscopes.

Unfortunately due to Covid-19 my first year of uni was cut short and I did miss out on a few things such as a field trip to Devon and some other field skills, however it did mean that my exams were turned into assignments which I found much easier as I could use my lecture notes to help me. On the bright side, as I had to leave uni earlier it meant that I was able to spend more time at home with my family. I have really enjoyed this as transport between home and university was difficult, so I wasn't able to go home much during term time.

I finished the end of my first year with flying colours! I achieved a First overall and even received a letter of Commendation. I have really enjoyed my first year of uni experience and have made some great friends, and for that, I am very thankful!

The Church Garden 2020



Despite the very different start to the spring planting of the garden, due to Covid 19, Ann, John and I, (once we were given permission to tend the garden) turned up early one morning to plant the bedding plants that Ann had grown from plugs.

At this time, the Church wasn't open for services etc., but we wanted the garden to look bright and cheerful for anyone passing by!

This, we are pleased to say, did the trick, and we had so many wonderful comments from members, friends, and complete strangers, all saying how the beautiful show of colour, truly brightened up the high street, along with the flowers, planted by the Council.

We have now planted the tulip and daffodil bulbs ready for next year and do hope the garden will give pleasure to everyone, once again!

Carol Price.

Editor's note: Congratulations to Carol Price, Ann and John Chard for being awarded the R.H.A.'s Certificate of Recognition for the garden.

THANK YOU !....on behalf of many, to Carol, John & Ann for keeping the church front gardens looking so beautiful all through the year, when the church premises have been empty due to the lockdown caused by the Coronavirus pandemic!.

Passing by in the street the display of flowers, shrubs and the neatly cut front lawn is a credit to your efforts and a delight to passers-by. The impression gleaned by many must give some hope that, despite the pandemic, life and hope is still real. To have the church premises supporting this fact can only leave folk with a lasting impression that the Church at large intends, with God`s help, to remain steadfast and solid, and that new life and "normality" will return....

Liz & John Bridges

Activities During Lockdown.

John Sibley

At the beginning of Lockdown, I found out that the Bath 5K sponsored walk was cancelled due to Coronavirus, and volunteers were requested to do the 5k “around their own premises”. I thought “that is not too difficult”, so I asked my friends and family for sponsorship, and I found that I could raise £500. As there was to be a long deadline of June to complete the job, I thought it was feasible, so some friends and I persuaded the sponsors, and very quickly the target was reached, so I decided to give them value for money, and in a rash moment, I mentioned to my friend Geoff that I thought that I would to walk a marathon. That immediately took hold of my supporters, and the pledges reached £1500, so I was by then fully committed to walking 290 circuits of my property, to cover the 26.1 miles required. As there was a time limit of June, I decided to cover a minimum of 2 miles per day, and eventually I covered the distance in 15 days, the extra was to ensure that the full distance was reached.

When I had finished, I still had many weeks left to fill before the deadline date, so I asked a few people if they would like a drawing of their dog, and this took off very quickly, and by July, the total had reached £3000, which was all paid in to Dorothy House by August, still in time for the fund raising deadline. Since then, I have continued to draw the dogs, but by now, I have extended the options to include buildings, hence Hallatrow Station.



Carol and Marilyn

Forever Friends of the RUH, Walk of Life Marathon 2020

In May this year the Walk of Life from Bishops Cannings, Devizes to Bath Holborn Museum, should have taken place and because of Covid 19 it was postponed to September.

As September approached it was realized that the event could not safely take place after all, so walkers were asked if they could do a 'virtual' marathon themselves during September. Options included walking the marathon in one go or spreading over several smaller walks.



We were so looking forward to it that we decided we would do it in one day. So on 4th September we set off from Newbridge Park & Ride, Bath to walk to Bradford on Avon and back following the canal path.

From the very start it seemed special. Sharing time together was the first special thing and as we walked along the river path to the city centre we saw a Kingfisher flying backwards and forwards and then perching on a tree.

As we reached the city centre a car came along the road, with hand waving from the window – relations taking their son to the railway station. Great encouragement – what timing!!

Passing along through Widcombe we saw a family of swans, more wonders of nature.

As we walked we started passing several people walking on the opposite side of the path, some smiling faces and morning greetings and some wearing masks who seemed scared to lift their heads and face others. We



wondered what was going on in their lives and felt sad for them. The detour we had to take, due to work on the tow path, as we approached the road crossing on Claverton Hill took us through Sydney Gardens. It was so peaceful and beautiful, a lovely diversion. All the way along the canal we were seeing so many ducks, swans, and hearing our favourite garden birds, more wonders of nature.

Some of the barges were very interesting to look at. On one of the barges there was a lovely garden feature, a Lady Flowerpot figure. On the way back we had a chance to speak to the owner of this barge and he told us how famous his “Flower Pot Lady” had become since sitting on their barge. She even now had a Facebook Page! He explained how he and his wife had bought her many years ago from the village of Berrynarbor in Devon which is famous for all its different ornamental figures. Some of you may know it.

When we reached Bradford on Avon we stopped by the lock and sat and had our packed lunch, buying a latte and cappuccino in the take-away café! Others sitting at a distance outside on the lock area were also enjoying the friendship of passers-by and the scene of the boats coming through the lock.

On the second half of our walk back to Newbridge we saw one of the boat owners taking down the canopy on the end of her boat. We passed the time of day with her and were very impressed with the size of the boat and asked whether it was classed as a barge. She told us, because of its size it was called a “ship”!! She asked how far we were walking and we told her of our challenge. When we mentioned the hospital, she was very moved as she had a family member who had been grateful for the work of hospital NHS staff and she wanted to add to our fundraising, and we can say that the Forever Friends of the RUH are very grateful to all who sponsored us, enabling us to forward in excess of £1500.

We got back to the car in Newbridge feeling very elated, having walked 27.2 miles, our marathon + accomplished, but most of all we felt overwhelmed with all the wonders around us – the people, nature and that we had been able to experience hearing, seeing and sharing in all of it. Where WASN'T God in all this?

Martin B Dymond.

It's been a 'funny' year for all folk, but for me it has been down and up with little joy to be had at the start. As most readers will know I was diagnosed with Bowel Cancer and in December '19 began chemotherapy. I was also seen by another consultant as the scan had shown I had an aortic aneurism as well as he was looking at the lack of blood pressure in my right leg [causing problems when I walked, hence me using a stick].

For 12 weeks of chemo, I was lucky, in that the only side effects I had were an extreme reaction to the cold [I really had to wrap up if outside] and no cold drinks, plus a bad taste when drinking tea, which I gave up for 8 weeks.

Then lockdown started and as a very vulnerable person, I didn't walk outside our garden walls for 9 weeks. However, a follow-up scan showed the cancer had reduced and had eliminated the spots on the liver, so I only needed the bowel surgery. *After a down, an up!* Then a phone call from the consultant delayed the bowel surgery; as he said: 'I'd like you in for surgery, in fact I have a slot tomorrow, but my brain tells me I don't want you anywhere near this hospital'. We agreed a delay to see the situation in June, [*a down!*] but a nurse phoned in May to offer me a date for 20th. The RUH had refurbished two wards for surgery recovery. Woe betide anyone not on their team who tried to come in. I heard the nurses shout to folk more than once to stay outside the doors!! But it did make you feel safe. My ward had 6 beds but only me, so a little lonely, but lots of personal attention!

Surgery was successful, [*an up!*] I took the expected 6 weeks to recover and felt much better especially as during chemo I had lost nearly a stone and a half and not put it on in lockdown. A 6-monthly blood test and annual scan for 3 years will keep a check on the bowel. The aneurism was a bit smaller than initially measured so I need only an annual scan to keep a check on that. *Another up!*

It seems I'm back to normal, without the weight; the leg has improved a bit so back to walking anything from 2 to 7 miles most days!!

Lockdown gave me a chance to sort out a lot of papers and photos of our family history. Many years ago a cousin had passed me a Family Tree to put on computer [and keep up-to-date] going back to 1760. I had a missionary great-uncle for which there is a lot of info. together with others of that generation. It's now in chronological order, each with their own papers and photos which will make it easier for my sons later on. I also sorted out my own memorabilia, old papers kept but no longer needed etc. together with a general sort-out and tidy-up.

I always have been a reader of paperbacks and doer of word puzzles [daily paper especially] and with a few jigsaw puzzles kept myself occupied – but

then I've been retired for many a year so lockdown wasn't a great difference. I only missed the going out, taking the car for drives/day outs and regular trips to family in Cornwall.

The other big miss was singing – church and choir. Mendip Male Voice Choir like all non-professional choirs had cancelled all concerts in 2020 and no rehearsals. Some members had kept in touch and the MD produced a weekly newsletter which included practicing various bits at home. A few did a sound recording and late in the year Jamie [MD] produced the music and backing tracks for us to learn some new pieces alongside practicing existing music.

Now as we approach the end of 2020, with Covid 19 still making the daily news, I feel a lot more positive than at the beginning of 2020. A lot of that I believe is due to faith, faith in God as a caring, healing deity; due to a lot of people holding me in prayer. I recall one person [not of our church] on hearing of my cancer, saying: 'That won't be a problem with your faith'. I like to think he was right, but not just mine but his and other people's faith also.

Like some of my walks, down dale and up hill, my year has had its downs and ups. But quite often the routine is like the cycle/foot paths smooth and level-going. I hope I can continue on the up side or at least keep it level like the 'Greenway or Colliers Way'.

I repeat, as I said in the testimony for a morning streamed service, 'Thanks to God and all the people who prayed for me for my return to health'. Keep smiling, keep safe.

Andrea Maddocks

I will remember this Summer as the one when we walked miles and miles. We found the source of the River Somer and explored many fields and local countryside. People have been kinder, in some ways, the ones who walked in the road or who crossed over, or who waited for you to pass, as we did also. A lot of patience was and is still, needed, for the queues in shops and when we got in them, the masks disguising people's mouths but not their eyes and some folk seemed to smile more often too. One of the hardest things for me personally, was missing the fellowship of being in the Church building, and more importantly, not being able to get too close to my son and grandchildren and not being able to cuddle or kiss them.

Mike Evans – Lay Pastoral & Community Worker (Somerset Mendip Circuit)

Lay Working Through The Pandemic

“Hi! How are we all doing?” is Revd Tina Swire’s usual cheery greeting as she gets the Somerset Mendip Circuit Leadership Team meetings underway. We meet for business on the second Thursday each month; and for devotions, prayer and mutual support on all other Thursdays. The meetings are on-line via Zoom; and typifies the way that life has changed since the Covid-19 virus arrived.

Before the virus we (the staff and stewards) met at the Circuit Office in Wells on a monthly basis, with mutual support happening in the margins of whatever business was to hand. Now nearly all meetings are on-line (and generally all the better for it). Business meetings tend to be more focused, and consequently shorter; while the regular devotional meetings provide much needed space for prayerful reflection and the opportunity to better support and encourage one another in these difficult times.

With so many church members shielding, pastoral work is mainly conducted by telephone, unless WhatsApp, FaceTime, or similar media are an option. It’s very different to making the personal visits that were a feature in the past; and, of course, hospital and care home visits will not be possible for the foreseeable future.

School assemblies aren’t happening either at present, so those of us who were going into school are getting to grips with recording material that can be viewed remotely.

Aside from the on-line and telephone work, a regular part of my work at present is helping to keep members and friends who do not have internet access still feel connected with church. The Connexional worship material for home use has been key to this. Each week I download and print off the worship sheets and post them out together with a minister’s pastoral letter. Being able to sit down on a Sunday morning at 10.30 a.m. and worship using the material, knowing that others are doing the same, has proved a very powerful means of helping people feel connected while churches remain closed.

Like Midsomer Norton, some churches are streaming and recording services – something that I think will be a feature of church life in the

future. Whilst this seems strange just now, it is opening new and exciting ways of being church and sharing the Gospel with many more people than we have been reaching in the past. It's all a question of being alert to where God may be at work through the pandemic and being open to where the Spirit may lead us.

Dianne & David Shearn

The curtailing of normal day to day activities, evening meetings, Tuesday Encounter Group, has led to more time for gardening and less stress. We've missed Sunday worship in the flesh, organ playing, calling in to Reception and general chats with all and sundry.

What we have appreciated and continue to do so are the services, starting with the weekly BBC 1 Sunday Mornings from Wales until they stopped. Fortunately having a computer, we could click in to our own local services and also those from Westminster Central Hall and the Oxford Circuit – good concluding organ voluntaries! Thanks to all concerned.

Family visits and special celebrations 'outside the bubble' were off limit, except outdoors and socially distanced. Perhaps we can now identify a bit more with the Holcombe villagers who lived and died with the great plague – *'Ring a ring a roses, a pocketful of poses, atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down!'*

Winter and Christmas will be different this year especially for families and those on their own as our leaders and experts wrestle with the pandemic. Say a prayer of encouragement for all those in health and social care, both on the front line and behind the scenes and their patients/ recipients. We continue to journey on in faith, hope and love, God bless!

Methodist Cricket - 2020 season

After many weeks of uncertainty, and the government finally giving the go-ahead, a shortened Methodists season began three months late with a very welcome T20 game against our friends at Dinder on 15th July. Various new rules had to be adhered to - player distancing, sanitising hands and cricket ball every six overs, both teams staying in separate bubbles when off the field, and the names and contact details of all those

in attendance being noted down in case of any subsequent positive Covid tests.

The Bristol & District Cricket Association re-jigged their usual divisional set-up into a system of 21 'pods' of six clubs each, based on their relative proximity - the Methodists' pod containing Chilcompton 2nds, Whitchurch 3rds, Brislington 4ths, Hampset 3rds (Bath), and Timsbury 3rds (at whose St Mary's Primary School ground the Methodists would be playing their 'home' matches).

The Methodists won six of the seven games they played, posting three scores of 200+ as their batsmen enjoyed bowling more friendly than would usually be faced in a normal league campaign - the 281-3 versus Brislington being their second-highest total ever. Alex Nash again topped the list of run scorers with four fifties and 137 versus Whitchurch, while David Baker (85 & 65*), Stuart Green (83*) and Mark Robinson (59) also recorded half-centuries.

The bowlers benefited from the, at times, gung ho nature of the opposition batsmen, who often seemed so intent on whacking the ball that they gifted their wickets to the wily Methodists attack. James Green claimed 13 (with a best of 5-43 against Brislington), Daniel Shearn 11, Craig Eyles 7 and Darcey Green an excellent five wickets.

I think everybody enjoyed themselves and hopefully - God willing - things will be closer to 'normal' next summer and more games can go ahead. But everyone was thankful just to get out on the field on a Saturday afternoon, as, for a while, it didn't look like the 2020 cricket season would happen at all...

Daniel Shearn

How Green Is Our Church?

The above question began nagging at members of the Thursday Evening Encounter Group after tackling a five-session study entitled 'Climate Change and the Purposes of God'* during the Spring last year. Whilst distinctly uncomfortable and challenging, the course also encouraged us to reflect prayerfully on the part that individuals and churches could play through Spirit led transformative action. It was this that prompted us to

take the matter to Church Council; a move which resulted in our being asked to form a working party to identify actions that the church might take. The A Rocha Eco Church Award offers a good way for churches to measure up against the best standards, so with the help of church office holders we made an initial assessment of how 'green' the Midsomer Norton Methodist Church is currently and identified areas for improving its rating against the model. The subsequent report currently awaiting Church is outlined Council discussion below.

The Eco Church Award scores aspects of church activity relating to environmental issues under five headings:

- Worship
- Buildings
- Land
- Community & Global
- Lifestyle

From information the Group have gleaned, the Midsomer Norton Church score is currently:

Heading	Available points	MSN current score	Award level
Worship	100	80	Gold
Buildings	450	120	Bronze
Land	125	15	None
Community & Global	230	48	None
Lifestyle	160	20	None
Totals	1,065	283	None overall

As things stand, the church does not qualify for an award although, as can be seen in the table above, both worship and buildings are heading us in the right direction. There are a number of actions that may be taken which will improve our score. Church Council are being asked to consider the following recommendations:

Worship

- A sharper and more regular focus in prayer and preaching on caring for God's earth (e.g.: celebrating Environment Sunday):
- Inviting guest speakers from environmental organisations:

- Encouraging small group study on the topic of caring for God's earth

Buildings & land (for Property Committee action)

- Arrange for energy usage to be measured and the church's carbon footprint to be calculated, and then set targets to achieve year-on-year improvements in energy efficiency to reduce, or offset, the footprint.
- Explore options for greener tariffs for both electricity and gas
- Explore the feasibility of using church premises for generating renewable energy, before the current gas boiler needs replacing
- Explore the possibility of rainwater collection for use in flushing toilets and for watering the garden
- Move towards full energy efficient/LED lighting throughout the premises as soon as possible
- Switch to buying recycled paper for office and toilets
- Ensure that gardens are planted to attract bees and other insects

Community & global engagement (for Church Council)

- Work towards regaining Fairtrade Church status
- Raise awareness of environmental issues within the life of the church and keep the congregation informed about the global impact of climate change
- Ensure that all church funds are ethically invested

Life style

Through short articles in the Crosslink magazine, the Eco Group will seek to encourage church members to consider their lifestyles and offer practical tips and advice on caring for God's earth day-to-day.

A number of ideas for increased recycling on church premises but, the practicality of these will need to be reconsidered in the light of Covid-19 developments The Group will make further recommendations on these at a later date.

Note*Study material published by Operation Noah

Lorraine & Mike Evans on behalf of Eco Group Working Party

A walk with Jesus in Myanmar

The full text of this inspirational story was too long to put in the magazine, but is highly recommended reading and can be obtained by email or a hard copy from Marjorie Gilson.

For all his life, Richard Vincent (Betty Voake's brother), had wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and trace his journey as a missionary in Burma, but the opportunity didn't arise until early this year. Then, one Sunday morning, a visitor appeared in Richard's Church in Maidstone, who turned out to be the President of the Conference in Upper Burma (Myanmar). Richard told him of his dream and he replied, "Book your flights and come, just come."

When Richard and his wife landed in Mandalay, the Revd. Kap Tluanga was there to greet them. Richard continues, "How amazing is our God. He walked with us every minute of every day of our visit."

The first Sunday worship was at the Wesley Methodist Church in Mandalay, where they met the Chair of the Local Preachers' Meeting and



his twin brother, who had been confirmed as a Local preacher by Richard's father and Irene, whom his father had baptised.

One of the places Richard and his wife visited was Tahan. When his father first went there, there were just 19 houses and a tiny Church. He went on to build a new Church and now the Tahan Methodist society has been sub-divided into

3 Districts and the total numbers for those Districts are: 56 Societies, 8,536 members, 1,800 houses, 270 Class leaders and 190 Local preachers. Richard says, "More importantly, they are continuing to grow, building new Churches and saving people for Jesus". The next visit was to Mawlaik, where the Minister's house is the same one Betty Voake lived in from 1934 to 1937. Richard says, "I could not believe, as we walked around the beautiful compound, that our dreams had become a reality. My Dad was

just 26 years old when he arrived in Mawlaik and here we were walking around his house in January 2020. I hope you are getting the feeling that the Holy Spirit was filling us and surrounding us as we travelled.”

One day when they were in the Methodist District Offices in Tamu, a young man said, “I have a photo for you to see,” and he showed Richard a picture of his father with the Revd. Mr Dengkuma, the first Burmese Methodist Minister who was ordained by Stanley Vincent. “I am Dengkuma’s grandson”, he said and Richard replied, “And I am Stanley Vincent’s son”, and they hugged each other there in the midst of the Methodist District Office, surrounded by young Christian men and women. Richard says, “Jesus was with us again and again.”

They also visited Rangoon, where Stanley Vincent was secretary for the British and Foreign Bible Society from 1954 to 1964. There they met David and Betty Su Tint, who were named after Betty Voake and David Read, the son of Dennis, Richard’s father’s “companion and best friend in Christ Jesus.”

In 1942, the war came to Burma. The missionaries had to flee to India, via Mandalay. Part of the journey meant walking 137 miles, seeing wounded soldiers along the way and enemy aircraft flying overhead. The party, which was led by Stanley Vincent was 250 people. As soon as his wife and 3 children were safely on the train to Calcutta, Stanley walked back to Burma towards the enemy, cadging lifts on army lorries, cars elephants and canoes until he arrived back in Mawlaik. He stayed there until the end and then once again set out for India, where he caught up with the family, wearing just a pair of shorts and sandals.

When their visit to Burma came to an end, Richard and his wife went to Chennai in South India. Their mission there was to visit the grave of Betty and Richard’s sister who had died there in 1944. It took some detective work to find the grave, because they had only one photo of the lonely gravestone, which no-one had visited since the funeral service.

Richard and his wife were surprised to discover that Chennai was the resting place of Doubting Thomas the apostle. They visited the church that marks his grave. Richard says, “Thomas played a light bulb moment in my discipleship transformation. Three years after Dad died, at Easter I was

sitting quietly reading the resurrection story and came to the moment when Jesus appeared to Thomas and the other disciples. Suddenly Jesus stood beside me and said “Richard why do you doubt? Put your hands in my hands, feel my side. Stop doubting and believe”. That was the moment when Jesus gave me my faith. Since then I have been able to say in my heart – faith is being sure of what we hope for and assurance in what we cannot see. When I looked again, I could no longer see him in my mind’s eye but he has never left me alone.

So you see this journey turned out not to be just the trip of a lifetime, but one more step in our walk with Jesus. He has sent us back to you with a message. Adopt the “Methodist Way of Life” as your way of life. Adopt three friends (members or not) and be their encourager, teach them about the “Methodist Way of Life” and use the card* as teaching us to breathe in and out the love of Christ, as a tool to remember the Methodist Way of Life every day of your lives and to use it as a mirror to see when your walk with Jesus is backsliding. Strengthen our Methodist Societies, inspire new groups to form in order to discuss their Christian life together and their personal walks with our Lord. This is the story of Jesus Christ in Myanmar. This is how they survived losing their ministers and churches twice. This how the Methodist Church in Myanmar is flourishing today and the work of sharing his love, started by the early missionaries, continued by my Father and now undertaken by the people of Burma today, is being nurtured and harvested twenty, forty, eighty, even hundreds and thousands of times. So let us learn from them. God be Praised. Amen”

*Methodist Way of Life Card can be found on the Methodist Web site at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/>



'God of creation, we praise you'