



Rev. Christopher Humble
Circuit Superintendent

Dear Friends,

As we journey with Jesus on his final days towards the scenes of his passion and the cross there are some significant figures who share in his journey. Simon of Cyrene was compelled by the Roman authorities to help carry the cross of Jesus. Luke 23. 26 reads “as the led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus”. This man just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, it would seem, so he was chosen to carry the cross that Jesus was struggling to manage on his own. He was probably (scholars believe) of black skin. He was from Cyrene in Libya, in North Africa. He is compelled to carry the cross of Jesus, he has no option, but comes strangely to represent all disciples of Jesus who seek to fulfil what Jesus himself said “unless you take up your cross and follow me....” Perhaps he was actually in the right place at the right time!

When I was at school we used to sing, in assembly, the hymn by Charles Wesley (MHB 717) “Help us to help each other Lord, each other’s cross to bear, let each his friendly aid afford and feel his brother’s care”. It has probably been excluded from our last two hymn books because of its apparent sexist language. Of course, Charles Wesley did not mean all disciples were male but he lived in another era when he used one word “brother” to mean both “brothers and sisters” and “his” to mean both “his/her”, but he hadn’t been on the unconscious bias training and knew little about inclusive language in the terms we are familiar with today! Despite its fault his words are still powerful. If you have a MHB you might take a look or google it!

Many years ago as a group of people from the different churches walked through the town centre of Grimsby a man was drawn in to the procession of witness and he wanted very much to carry the cross. A local preacher commented to me that “we have our very own Simon of Cyrene!” We did not compel him to carry the cross, he very much wanted to be involved. He was you may say drawn to it. In a strange way it was a fulfilment of the words of Jesus “when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to me”. It is a reminder that the old, old story we hear, dramatize, sing and pray through each Holy Week

has a compelling nature about it. Each year perhaps we rehearse its themes we hear something new and engaging.

We are living through troubled times, of course, with war in Iran, Israel, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries, (not forgetting Ukraine), we have been drawn in by permitting British territory to be used for landing and launching aircraft, some of our own Royal Navy vessels are being sent to the region. Mixed messages emanate from the White House. Nearer home many families are struggling with the cost of living crisis. There are plenty of people who need help and plenty of ways we can do this.

The hymn goes on “Help us to build each other up, our little stock improve, increase our faith, confirm our hope and build us up in love”. It is a sentiment that speaks of using the little we may have to build on to work for improvement. I wonder if Wesley was drawing on a banking term, “stock” as in joint stock company but that may be conjecture. I think he meant building each other up in terms of encouraging each other in the way we should go, so we develop and make progress in the Christian life. It is about mutuality and caring for each other, so we lend a hand when we can and shoulder the burdens of one another. In addition to this we are invited to build ourselves “up into thee, our living, let us in all things grow” as we seek to grow in grace, develop in our walk with Christ, go deeper, and make advances in our discipleship.

I wish you every blessing for Holy Week and Easter.
Chris Humble

PS.

Please be aware that following on from presentations at the Circuit Meeting the process of Listening Events which happened last year are resuming as we move to a further stage. Meetings with circuit officers will take place at all church councils in coming weeks (late April

The Mission of the Southport Methodist Circuit is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ by inspiring, encouraging, resourcing and enabling the people and churches of the Circuit to serve and transform their communities and the wider world.

agrees, viewing end-of-life baptisms as “moments of realisation” or the deepening of an existing spark rather than a brand-new conversion.

This inclusivity extends to all traditions. The team maintains a robust network of representatives, including Rabbis, Imams, and Humanists, to ensure that if a patient requires specific religious support outside the Methodist tradition, their needs are met with dignity.

Beyond ritual, chaplains often serve as the final repository for a patient’s life history. This is particularly evident in the Sacrament of the Sick (formerly known as Last Rites). Martin points out that while confession is a vital Catholic tradition, the need for absolution is universal. “Sometimes we are trusted with people’s secrets or confessions because they need to settle something they can’t sort out now. Other times, we are simply the messengers, entrusted with final words for their loved ones.”

Presence in a Digital Age

While the world has moved toward Zoom and Teams, hospital chaplaincy remains a profoundly “in-person” vocation. Jan and Martin acknowledge that while they provide phone support for families, nothing replaces being at the bedside.

This was put to the ultimate test during the COVID-19 pandemic. When families were barred from wards, chaplains donned full PPE and sealed masks to ensure no one faced the end alone. As Jan puts it, they were there “in person, sometimes when



Revd. Jan Fraser



Revd. Martin Abrams MBE

family couldn’t be.” It reinforces Martin’s guiding “strap line” for the service: “We’re there for all people in all circumstances.”

Why Chaplaincy? The Shift from Pulpit to Bedside

The leap from leading a congregation to walking hospital corridors is significant. For Jan and Martin, the attraction lay in stripping away the “business” of religion to return to the heart of ministry.

For Jan, the move was about reducing the administrative weight of traditional circuit ministry. If I’d wanted to be running a business or a social club, I’d have done a business degree,” she notes

candidly. After years of struggling with statistics for mission, building maintenance, and accounts, she rediscovered her true calling in the wards. “In chaplaincy, you don’t have to worry about the building or the accounts. You can just focus on the person in front of you.”

Martin came to the role after 20 years of ordained ministry, including 12 years as a Superintendent in Southport. For him, the shift was a natural evolution. “In a church, you journey with the same people throughout their lives,” Martin explains. “In a hospital, you might enter someone’s life for only 20 minutes and never see them again. You are living entirely in that moment.”

The Weight of the Work

Dealing daily with “spiritual distress” requires a unique temperament and a strong support system. “We often say you have to be a bit mad to work here,” Jan laughs. The secret to their resilience is their team. “We’ve always got somebody to debrief with. Sometimes you just sit in the car for five minutes to reflect, and as you drive away, you leave it there.”

Through secrets, sacraments, and the simple act of listening, Martin and Jan continue to provide a universal safety net, proving that in the high-tech world of modern medicine, the “human touch” remains the most essential medicine of all.

As members of the spiritual care team for the Mersey West Lancs Trust. Martin, Jan and the team support people in Southport, Ormskirk, Whiston, St Helens, Newton hospitals and Queenscourt hospice.

If you are ever in hospital and require the teams support please contact them on:

01704704639

or email them at:

soh-tr.chaplains@merseywestlancs.nhs.uk



NWED District Safeguarding Conference 2026

Trauma-Informed Practice: Learning, Reflecting,
Growing Together

The first in person conference as a new district!

This year we will be focusing on Trauma-Informed Practice, with a rich programme designed to inspire, challenge, and equip all who work to create safer environments across our district. Join us for a day of insight, conversation, and shared learning, featuring contributions from Karen Jobson, returning after highly valued sessions at the 2025 and 2026 Connexional Safeguarding Conferences

The Methodist Survivors Advisory Group, delivering a dedicated session

Q&A with Tim Carter, Director of Safeguarding for the Methodist Church

Facilitated table discussions throughout the day

Regional Officers for Safeguarding, available for support, questions, and conversation

This is a wonderful opportunity to learn together, hear lived experience, explore good practice, and strengthen safeguarding culture across the district.

Saturday 16 May 2026, 10:00am–4:00pm (arrivals from 9:30am)
Leyland Methodist Church (9 Turpin Green Lane, Leyland, PR25 3HA)

Houghton Weavers (management) Ltd Presents:

THE HOUGHTON WEAVERS

with Simon Brady on Guitar and Mandolin



Leyland Rd Church, Southport Friday 18th September

Tickets £16

7.30pm Start (doors open 6.45pm)

Tel: Christine: 07808 271671

or in person from the venue:

Tel: (01704) 536648

(Mon - Thurs 9am-1pm)



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Circuit Easter Offering Dedication Service

Sunday 19th April 2026

6.30pm at Formby Methodist

Led by Rev Sheila Prest

Followed by Refreshments

Everyone is Welcome

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