

Working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church

User Guide to the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity



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A Summary of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

Being Christian, according to this strategy, means:

- celebrating God who made each person in God's own image
- being disciples of Jesus who treated each person with dignity
- rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all people

The 2021 Methodist Conference adopted a new report which explains why this is so important and spells out why it is vital to learn from one another so that we can recognise God's presence more fully in our life together.

The report also includes some mandatory actions for local churches, circuits, districts and the Methodist Council. These will help us to live as a people with a culture of justice and respect for all people.

We are committed to becoming a church that prioritises **justice and dignity** for all, especially those who have previously been excluded, and which stands in active **solidarity** with them.

You can find the full report here:

www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy

This means becoming a church which:

- is free of all forms of discrimination
- celebrates the rich diversity of humanity and recognises that **all** people are made in the image of God

- has structures and processes which allow everyone to participate fully
- has a leadership which reflects the diversity of our membership
- offers safe spaces for the general public, and for members, to meet with a diversity of people, while still being honestly themselves
- ensures that its leaders are trained to understand issues of diversity and exclusion
- listens to, takes seriously, and acts upon any reports of discrimination or prejudice.

A PRAYER

God we come to you and you welcome us.
Some of us are tired and others are bristling with energy.

Your love upholds each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us.
Some of us exploring doubts, and others filled with certainty.

Your love inspires each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us.
Some of us at peace, and others itching with anxiety.

Your love calms each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us.
Some of us knowing joy, and others in pain.

Your love reaches out to each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us.
You search us, and you know us.
Each of us fearfully and wonderfully made.
Each of us bearing your image.
Each of us celebrating your love!
Thank you God. Amen.

The Revd Liam

Grounding this report in Scripture

- Whilst the Bible contains stories of discrimination against people (stories of enslavement, sexual violence, and the equating of disability with sin) there are broader and deeper golden threads throughout Scripture, which challenge these stories and point towards a God whose love is universal (Genesis 1:26-27, Isaiah 2:1-4, Luke 10:25-37).
- Jesus showed God's love by his openness to all people, including reaching out to those who were marginalised in his day, and he was often criticised for keeping company with people others thought he should keep away from. Yet, in Jesus Christ, strangers became friends (Acts 2:42-47).
- The early Christians understood that God's Holy Spirit was breaking down old boundaries and divisions (Acts 10). They shared a new-found understanding of the diversity of God's gifts in their lives and this variety was seen to be crucial in the building up of the early Christian community – the Body of Christ in which each part of the body was dependent upon the other parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
- Many of the letters written by Paul and others to the Early Church speak of the importance of good and healthy relationships within the Christian community (Romans 12). If Christians were to be a sign of God's kingdom and a reflection of God's unconditional love, then they must be living examples of Christ's new commandment in which Jesus told his followers that they were to "love one another ... as I have loved you." (John 13:34).

A PRAYER

God of all, praise and thanks be yours through Jesus, who at his birth received visits from shepherds and foreigners,
 who invited fishermen and tax collectors to be his disciples,
 who taught us not to judge others,
 who healed a Roman's servant and a Canaanite's daughter,
 who was happy to be counted as one who ate and drank with sinners,
 who challenged religious leaders for neglecting justice, mercy and faith,
 who sets before us an example of the inclusive mission and ministry of the gospel.
 Cleanse us by your Holy Spirit, and as we reject and resist discrimination may we truly love and serve you as we love and serve all.
 In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Revd Mark

The Bible study exercise on page 11 is inspired by this prayer.

Why does the Methodist Church need this strategy?



“It was several years after being told I wasn’t suitable for the position – and doing considerable self-searching to understand why – that I was brave enough to discuss it with others. That’s when I realised my rejection was actually systemic. No one ‘like me’ was deemed suitable.”

“There is always that sideways glance, that extra eye roving taking in what I am wearing or how I look, and no matter how hard I try, I feel that if I ever offer anything in church council or at any church meeting, there is always a downward glance, an intake of breath, a benign smile at the corner of the lips, a lip-service tolerance of ‘allowing’ me to speak. But my words are not heard... I wish I didn’t have to stay silent for fear of rocking the boat. I wish I didn’t feel so alone in church.”



For more quotations and stories see the full Strategy www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy or the EDI Toolkit: www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/

Our Calling as Methodists has always included a calling to social justice, but we have often failed to live that out because we have excluded people based on prejudices. These might be people who live with a disability, or a different ethnicity, sexuality, age, gender, or life experience from ourselves. Sometimes we might deliberately exclude someone for one of these reasons because of a prejudice that we hold. Sometimes our biases are unconscious, and we do not realise the negative impact of our words and

behaviours on another person. Yet the belief that all human beings are loved by and created in the image of God is fundamental to who we are as Christians. Our behaviour needs to witness to our beliefs.

PRAYERS

Lord, we come to you when our hearts are filled with worries and when our burdens are heavy.

You give us strength no worldly creation could match. You give us joy that reaches far down into our soul.

You give us a place where we are not rejected: where your Spirit brings new life and pure wisdom; where we feel included, safe and loved.

Help us to bring your inclusiveness into the world and to let all know about your goodness and love. Amen.

Chito

It’s so easy, Lord, to behave in a way that isn’t welcoming;

to only want people like us; those who talk like us, think like us and act like us.

It’s hard to welcome those who behave in strange ways,

those who challenge our preconceived ideas and those we struggle to like.

Yet you call us to love all.

Forgive us for the times when we have been unwelcoming, for the times we haven’t loved and for the times we have turned your children away.

Forgive us, for just as those who we have turned away need the good news of your radical love, so do we. In the name of Christ. Amen.

James

Today the Methodist Church still sees this culture of care, inclusivity and connectedness as always centred in God. It is the vital discipleship that we are called to, as we respond to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

The Methodist Church celebrates the varied range of human life and experience by the way it is organised. We all depend on one another and the relationships we have are mutual, placing belonging, and inter-dependence, at the heart of church life. This is what we call connexionalism – a way of organising the Church nationally which emphasises that no local church is, or can exist, on its own. We make decisions together, sharing responsibility, in a spirit of conferring and relationship, making sure that we talk with, and listen to one another.

At the heart of Methodist belief is the idea that God's grace is offered freely to all people. Hospitality, openness and welcome for all are crucial to Methodism and are key to demonstrating God's grace and love for all. This welcome, though, is for each one of us and needs to include the opportunities for each person to participate fully as ourselves in partnership with each other. John Wesley's idea of perfect love leads us to seek relationships that include a deeper appreciation of one another, as we discover how God is working in and through us all.

It is also important to say that there has never been a perfect Christian community. Broken relationships, discrimination, and exclusivity have all been part of the life of the Church up to and including today. Tragically, there have been incidents of discrimination, coercive control and abuse of power which have not been challenged. Some of the stories in the full report show a Church which falls a long way short of Christ's new commandment and is not the interdependent Body of Christ which God intends the Church to be. We

recognise that, within the Church, some people are not accepted, respected, and treated as equals.

So, this report gives a challenge for the Church to acknowledge and to repent of the ways in which we have failed to live up to Our Calling. This must inevitably lead to change.

The Methodist Church is called to engage positively with wider society and with the local communities around us. For many of us, work and voluntary experiences beyond our local churches will help us to help each other with relating respectfully within the Church.

As we live out positive relationships across difference within the Church we will also learn more about the world around us. This learning will equip us for engaging well with one another in our neighbourhoods, workplaces and UK society.

A PRAYER

Let the pride of the powerful surrender to love.
 Let the prejudice of the privileged surrender to love.
 Let the bitter corners of our hearts surrender to love.
 Let the cold of our uncaring ways surrender to love.
 Let the brokenness of our estrangements surrender to love.
 Let the blindness of our ignorance surrender to love.
 Let us surrender all to love, as we pray to the Holy One who encompasses all creation with love. Amen.

Deacon Ruth

What sort of change are we committing to?

A Opening ourselves up to the change God wants to work in us, and recognising the real trauma of exclusion and disadvantage experienced by many within the Church, we need to understand the type and scale of the transformation needed. This report recognises that God seeks to **create Structural, Cultural and Attitudinal Change**, which in turn will equip the Church to have a voice about these issues in wider society.

Structural Change means that the Church must review the entire way it works, accepting that the ways of working and power dynamics of previous and current generations have left many people excluded. Shifts and changes in our policies and organisational arrangements (for example the way in which staff are recruited) will be necessary. We will need to make sure that all voices are heard and that there is transparency and good communication in everything we do.

Cultural Change can be described as change to 'the way things are done around here'. Every individual, church, circuit, district and the Connexional Team will need to reflect on this so that we can recognise the values, beliefs and assumptions we have. We will then need to learn to behave, interact, make decisions and carry out activities in ways that make it possible for a bigger variety of people to be fully part God's Church.

Attitudinal Change will involve every Methodist being open to a change of heart, mind and actions. This will include listening and learning and challenging our own assumptions. We all need to take responsibility for recognising our own fears, prejudices, and negative or damaging perceptions and behaviours. We need to learn about our own power, and how to use it to enable and strengthen, rather than control or put down, others within the Body of Christ.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we will then reflect God's love for all people in a way that enriches us all.

A PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you came into the world, took on flesh and lived among us.

You ate with sinners, healed foreigners, welcomed children, embraced outcasts and broke all sorts of rules in order to be a bridge rather than a wall.

Teach us to embrace the way you worked in the world: beyond the borders of religious tradition, social status, nationality and experience.

Show us how, time and again, your grace transcended and overflowed beyond expectations and boundaries.

Stretch our understanding of insiders and outsiders and reorient our sense of morality as you cleanse us from all self-righteousness.

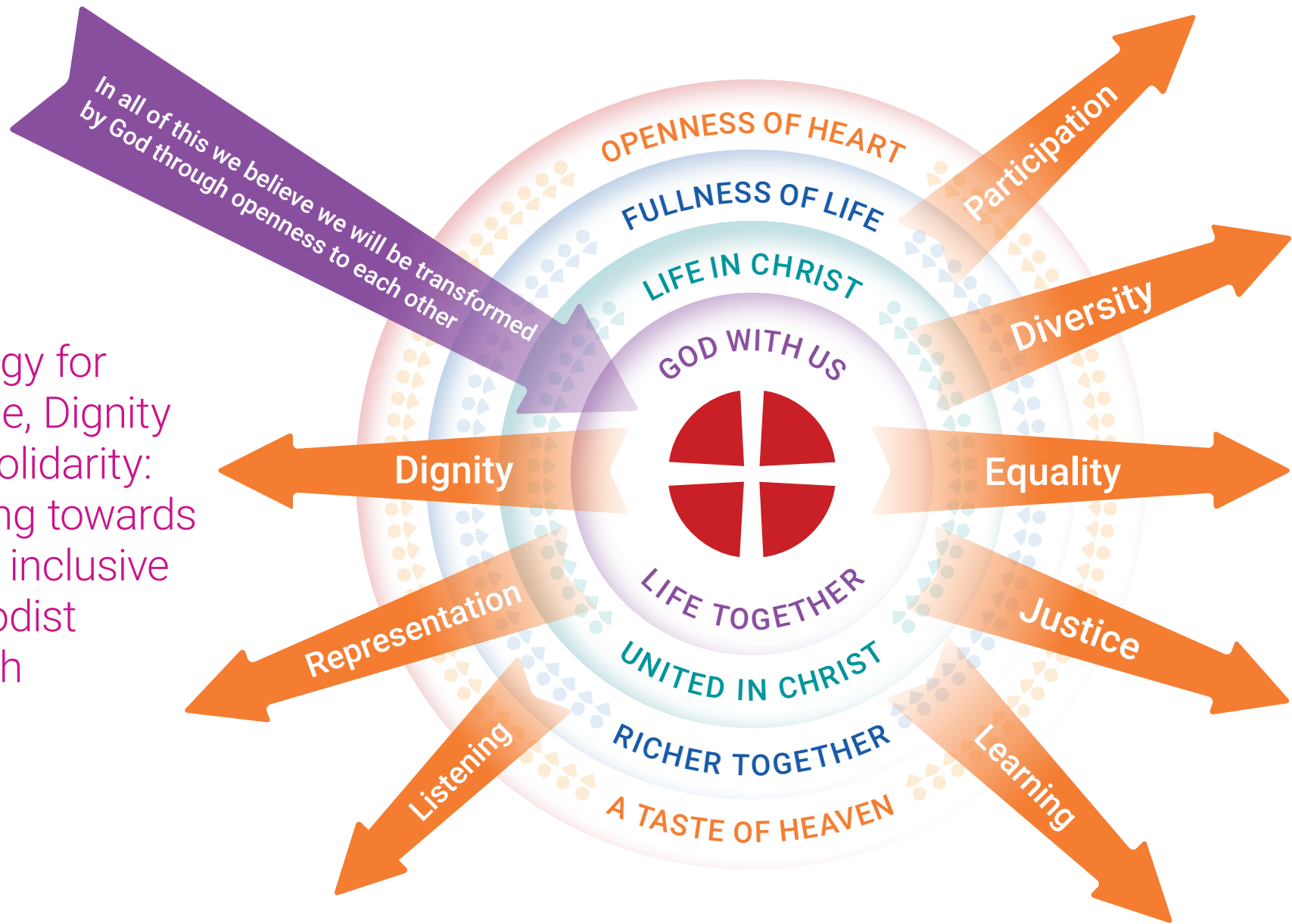
Teach us to see our privileges as opportunities to serve the needs of others.

Make our hearts, homes, churches and society places of welcome and hospitality for all.

Amen.

The Revd Dr Sahr, President, Methodist Church in Ireland 2021/2022

Strategy for
Justice, Dignity
and Solidarity:
working towards
a fully inclusive
Methodist
Church



What does the strategy recommend?

The strategy includes a wide range of recommendations and actions.

Key among these are:

- An encouragement for the Church to celebrate diversity.
- A discrimination response system, so that people can disclose situations of discrimination or exclusion and be supported.
- A personal responsibility commitment, so that people can commit to learning and changing their behaviour to be more inclusive.
- A pilot Truth and Reconciliation process to allow stories of discrimination and exclusion to be told and heard so that reconciliation and change can begin.
- Mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training within Methodist Leadership.
- The adoption of Positive Action steps from the Equality and Human Rights Commission for all appointments within the Methodist Church.
- Each circuit and district will appoint an EDI Officer to support the implementation of this strategy.
- The Appointment of a new Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee to have ongoing oversight of the implementation of the strategy.

None of these things will be possible unless we all, as Methodists, pray about our own prejudices and commit to this strategy in order for things to change for the better.

A PRAYER

God of all, we praise you for the diversity found in your Church.

Help us to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,
to celebrate our different cultures and spiritual traditions and to rejoice that we have all been baptised in one Lord.

Give us grace to be ourselves while also working for unity in your Church. Amen.

The Revd Reynaldo

AN INVITATION

Every Methodist is called upon to share this vision for a future in which we journey in justice, dignity and solidarity and to commit ourselves to taking action towards the work of God as described here. This is always a work in progress – we journey together, opening ourselves to being partners with God and with all whom God calls. This work is a transformative witness to our loving and just God, so that we may speak and live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank you for loving us equally.
Help us to love one another and to treat each other with respect and dignity. Amen.

Ryan

Questions for reflection on your own, individually, or in a group

- 1) Having read this summary of the strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, how does it make you feel? What are your initial reactions to it? Is there anything in the strategy that surprises you? *(Your honest initial responses are important and will help you recognise what your first steps might need to be.)*
- 2) Are there times when you have deliberately excluded others by your actions or words from any aspect of church life, based on a prejudice? Or felt yourself excluded by others? What happened and how do you feel about it now? How could things have happened differently?
- 3) Is there anything in here that might make you review situations from the past and interpret what happened differently?
- 4) The strategy talks about the need for the Church to undergo **Structural, Cultural and Attitudinal Change**. In your own church and personal context, can you think of one example of each of these types of change that might need to happen for the strategy to be successful?

If you like to respond creatively perhaps you could consider:

- A collage where everybody adds a picture of something special to them from their own background and culture
- A collaborative art project
- A photography exhibition where everybody contributes several photos 'typical' of their daily life context
- A celebration of food which 'recreates home' for each of you

- Any kind of celebration or festival of the rich diversity of your communities, both inside church and in the wider community

You may want to use some of this celebration as part of your worship together.

A PRAYER

Lord of all, forgive the narrowness of my vision; the hidden prejudices that lead me to dismiss others as unsuitable for your kingdom; the desire to claim you for my own and to shape you into an image that makes you a comfortable companion for me.

My only hope is in the transforming power of your love that can shatter my exclusive images of you, open me to the challenge of your voice and give me new understandings of the breadth, depth and reach of your love.

To you, all are of worth and all are called – even an imperfect disciple such as me. Amen.

Keith

Here are some ways that we could each put this strategy into action.

- **Pray**

- ... for your district's EDI Officer and EDI team
- ... for the work of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity within your circuit and church
- ... for yourself as you recover from any past hurts or exclusion
- ... for forgiveness for when you have hurt, disregarded or discriminated against anybody
- ... for yourself, that you might reflect the love of Jesus Christ and the respect he showed
- ... for the Methodist Church in Britain as we introduce the recommendations of the strategy, working towards justice, dignity and solidarity.

A PRAYER

Inviting God, help us to see that every person has a place in your presence.

Forgive us when we try to limit our friendships to people who look like us, act like us, believe like us.

Through your Holy and transforming Spirit, move us from exclusion to inclusion, from formulators of fences to builders of bridges, from indifference to all-encompassing love.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

The Revd Sonia, President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022

- **Put Equality, Diversity and Inclusion on the agenda**

The 2021 Methodist Conference agreed that, "In order to ensure this work is effective in every area of Methodist life, an EDI item should appear on each Methodist agenda, asking: 'Do our mission and ministry reflect our Methodist commitment to being a fully inclusive Methodist Church (in line with

the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity)?'" Use the words that work best for you, but there needs to be a question about how we are being faithful in our calling to be disciples who follow Jesus Christ.

You can make sure that this work is on the agendas of your church life and explain that it needs to be added if not. Then begin to wonder what this will mean and what kinds of conversations you need to have together with the whole church congregation or circuit meeting.

- **Practise these questions until they become your normal response when asked to do something:**

- Would I contribute to the diversity of this team?
- Who else is on this team?
- Who else is involved in this group?
- Who else is involved in this piece of work?
- What other points of view might there be?
- Who could share this role with me?
- Who could I ask about different ways of doing this?
- Should I step back from this work to let somebody else take up my role?
- Who could I encourage to take up this role and to do it in their own style?

As we go 'back' to lots of ways of church life post pandemic, and as we develop new patterns for our ways of working, we could factor in more time to carefully listen to and engage with a wider range of people. Collaborative working always takes longer but we are always richer for it as God's whole people.

A PRAYER

Lord of us all, thank you for inviting us to take a seat at your table of grace.

We admit we're a little nervous, though, about the ones we're sitting next to.

Some of them make us uncomfortable, especially the ones who remind us of our own bad habits. Like the sons of Zebedee, we'd prefer to be sitting next to you.

Forgive us, Lord, when we want to rearrange the place cards, and help us to recognise your presence in all your children. Amen.

The Revd Bonni-Belle

- **Work out which particular experience of life you find hardest to understand.**

How could you become better informed about the areas of life where you recognise that you have prejudice?

If there are people you don't know very well, how might you learn more about their experience?

- **Share the good news!**

Talk with others about this strategy and encourage each other to stop and think about it before acting or making decisions. An Equality Impact Assessment will be available online early in 2022.

Tell people outside your church why equality, diversity and inclusion matter to the Methodist Church in Britain, because they matter to God, and how we are seeking to be a church of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity for all people.

A COMMITMENT PRAYER

God of all goodness, grace and love, transform us by your Holy Spirit.

As the Methodist Church may we value the uniqueness of all people, each made in your image. And may I commit, again, today to follow in the way of Jesus Christ:

Help me as I try to live in a justice-seeking way.

Help me to treat other people with dignity in my encounters,

conversations and relationships.

Help me to stand in solidarity with Methodists different from myself,

including those on the 'edges' or the 'margins', so that we may work together well.

Help me to learn as I listen.

May the Methodist Church show your kindness of heart in our life together.

May we take courage as we are transformed into a community of justice.

May we reflect the Spirit of Christ in our love for all your people.

Give us your goodness, grace and love we pray, Amen.

Bible study exercise: A different point of view

Often we look at things from only one particular point of view, especially if we have seen things that way for a long time. This spiritual and emotional 'short-sightedness' closes our eyes to how God might be working in the lives of other people and it prevents us from celebrating the love of God in all its fullness of life.

When you are studying the Bible, alone or with others, try praying for God to give you a different perspective, to enjoy seeing things from another point of view. It's an exercise that can be used with many different passages of Scripture, and some that might be a good place to start are suggested here:

Matthew 12:9-14	Jesus heals someone with a withered hand
Matthew 18:1-7	Jesus welcoming a child
Mark 2:1-12	Jesus heals someone who is paralysed
Luke 6:1-5	Jesus' disciples break the Sabbath Law
Luke 7:2-10	Jesus heals the centurion's slave
Luke 7:11-17	Jesus raises the widow's son
Luke 7:36-50	Jesus is anointed by a woman

Imagine if you were somebody who everybody rejects, except Jesus. How might you hear what is said? How might you respond to the things Jesus does and says? By looking at things from a different point of view we sometimes find that we understand more, perhaps something we'd missed before.

We learn more of how God transforms different lives. We understand more about one another and how and why we each respond as we do, whether we agree with each other or not. Through this God opens our eyes and helps us to learn.

Perhaps you could try this exercise in your own church or circuit, by reading a Bible passage and asking people to share their responses. Sharing together in this way is likely to highlight how the same passage can affect each of us differently.

- What life experience does this passage connect with?
- What feelings does it provoke?
- Why do you respond as you do?
- What might this help the whole church/circuit to hear?

A PRAYER

Most generous God, in your borderless kingdom all creation finds its home.

We thank you for your gracious and unconditional invitation to be part of your body.

Help us to pay attention to those whose voices are too weak to be heard and to those who live in the forgotten corners of our world.

We pray for all those who are excluded from the richness of your creation, especially those countries where access to the Covid-19 vaccine is limited.

Help us to follow the movement of your Holy Spirit, ever reaching into the margins of our lives and communities. Amen.

The Revd Dr Paul

Over the next year, more resources will be provided to support you with this work.

The Methodist Conference has agreed that good conversations are key to our listening and learning from one another.

Don't worry about what to say, but do ask people to tell you if you use some offensive language by accident. If that happens you can ask if they could tell you why it's difficult language for them. This will help us all to learn and to grow in our understanding of the people alongside us in our Christian journey.

The full Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy can be found here:
www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy

If you would like to be more involved in this crucial work, or have questions to ask, please contact the Revd Jill Marsh at marshj@methodistchurch.org.uk

There are two places to find more help:

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit is here:

www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/

The Methodist Church has produced an Inclusive Language Guide which can be found here:
www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy

You could also email marshj@methodistchurch.org.uk or speak to your district's EDI Officer.

