



MARCH 2026



## With Hearts and Hands and Voices: 5th Unity Women's Desk Consultation: *February 2026*

Here is the group from our British Province:  
Srs Norma, Jane, Mary, Roberta and Janet.

**'Be strong, let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.'** Psalm 31:24

The Unity Women's Desk (UWD) 5th Consultation took place last month in Arusha, Tanzania. 'With hearts, and hands and voices' we focused on how we can each become an advocate for the damage of violence to women and girls within our Church and societies.

The UWD is Unity wide and belongs to us all. In our Moravian Church the UWD is the only group that handles violence against women. Therefore, as we challenge gender-based violence (GBV), ecumenical partnerships are an important way of working.

To challenge the violence suffered by girls and women we must each become an advocate. Advocacy is the act of speaking on behalf of someone in support of a cause or policy. The goal is for change and to improve the conditions of others.

Fighting for an end to gender-based violence is important because men and women are equal before God. Rev Mary Kategelie (Tanzania) spoke with passion and clarity about how

the Bible makes it clear that gender equality is important, basing her talk upon Genesis 1:27. She invited all of us at the Consultation to thank God we are created as women. We should all ask 'Why am I here - what is God's purpose in sending me here?' One answer is for us to focus upon achieving God's justice for equality of men and women.

From Rev Mary's inspiring talk, we went into small groups to discuss questions about violence to women and girls in our societies and how our church addresses the problem of violence against women. Later Rev Mary gave us a powerful summary from across the groups. This included the conclusion that the harsh reality that violence against women and girls is global. The violence can take many forms: physical, sexual, economic and psychological. Many factors contribute to such violence, including war, cultural and church silence (including a fear of speaking out), being trapped in a cycle of poverty, social media and mental health issues.

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# Looking back and looking forward

Unity Prayer Day on the 1st of March is on my mind as I write this. It will mark the 569th year of The Moravian Church as a separate branch of the Christian Church. The Church was born out of a particular understanding of the life of a Christian. It came out of a desire that Christians 'should be guided only by the gospel and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy apostles and gentleness humanity patience and love for our enemies' (the patriarch Gregory quoted in Rican's *History of the Unity of the Brethren*). Looking back now we might say that it was a call to follow Jesus wholeheartedly in word and in deed.

Looking forward we need to ask ourselves honestly if this is still our calling, faith and practice today. And if it isn't what are we going to do about it. It feels as if, over the years, we have become like an old ship with barnacles get attached to us slowing us down and making us heavier than we should be. We have beloved traditions like Christingle and Advent Stars, settlements and an amazing history. These things are so precious, but they should not be the core of who we are and why we are Moravians.

We are not just a heritage group trying to preserve history and historic buildings but a living Christian Church. Sometimes it feels as if we are gathered together to feel comfortable and safe with the things that were there in our childhood. None of these things are wrong in themselves and many are positively good for example our history can reach out to others (see Sally Ann Johnston's 'What I Believe' interview

in this issue) and we need to be a place of safe refuge. But in a world that is crying out for authenticity our following of Jesus and our understanding and practice of our faith should be central.

So, looking forward, we are coming to Provincial Synod in July, and we will have some major decisions to make. I pray that it's not just about regretting what we have lost and fearing about the present. I believe that we could be standing on the threshold of new opportunities to return to basics and finding new ways to practice and share our faith. There are exciting ideas and ways of moving forward. But it means that we may have to live in ways that nudge us out of our comfort zones, have a renewed calling to follow Jesus and to live more authentically Christian lives.

Next year will be the 570th anniversary of the founding of the ancient Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum), and also the 300th anniversary of the renewal of the Church at that amazing Communion Service in Berthelsdorf, when the Holy Spirit touched those attending from Herrnhut in a new and powerful way. May this year be a time when we as a Church get fit and ready to celebrate these events with a new heart, a deeper faith and confidence in our Lord to move forward.

**Sr Sarah Groves**  
Editorial Team



# Raising Faith Monthly

from the Youth and Children's Committee (YCC)

Our article this month comes from Sr Claire Maxwell, member of the Youth and Children's Committee, and minister at Lower Wyke Moravian Church.



# Forest Church at Lower Wyke

Forest Church began as an idea inspired by God's creation, the beautiful space we have at Lower Wyke known in the village as 'The Paddock' and having seen various Forest Church and Forest Schools. It also reflected the fact that families, particularly those with younger children often find outdoor spaces far more relaxing than indoor ones and that God is very much in nature as much as a church building.

The team that came together were enthusiastic about children's ministry, with some clear specialisms in under 5's and very artistic and creative souls. We also needed (and got!) people happy to run the fire pit safely.

### So how does Forest Church at Lower Wyke work?

There is a familiar structure to it that families who have come for all three sessions run so far since its inception in September 2025 may have begun to spot.

We begin with some sort of **active game** - a treasure hunt or a game like 'scarecrow tig/stuck in the mud' but adapted in some way to reflect the theme of the session. This allows the children to run off their wonderful energy and give parents enough time to fill sign in sheets in, or forms if it is their first time, and to just take a moment to breathe.

Then we gather and a member of the team explains the layout of the rest of our time together which is:

**Welcome** - welcoming people back, explaining the order of things and our theme.

**Gathering** - go and gather in some materials from nature to make our Land Art piece together.

**Storytelling** - this is a story from the Bible that relates to our theme. For instance, this last January our theme was 'God's love of animal and bird in Creation' and we talked about the story of Noah.

**Land Art** - we make a part of the story together: we did a 'Rainbow' using the

colours nature gave us to talk about our Noah's story a bit more and deepen our learning into doing.

**Craft** - We then go further and deepen our understanding with a take home craft. In January we created a fat ball for birds to be able to feed off, encouraging us as humans to care for God's creatures.

**Fire pit** - Smores, hot chocolates. Followed by prayers, songs if we wish, and a blessing.

### What have we found?

Families come and seem very happy to join us in most weathers. We moved inside for November's session because it was torrential rain, but even then, went outside in our Gathering section to give the children a chance to run around a bit but return to the warmth.

Communication with families is key. We email them the night before and also put on our Facebook group the weather forecast and our plans - if we plan to stay outside or head in at all. We, also, try and suggest what to wear (e.g., wellies, gloves, hats or if we ever get so lucky sun cream). We do this to try and ensure no one is miserable because they haven't dressed appropriately.

### Who comes?

It is aimed at families, but we have had all generations come along - aunts and uncles, great aunts, grandparents as well as parents. None family linked people are welcome, but our advertisement is focused on those connected with children as we recognised that our hope as a church community is to keep building up family links. This is partly because Lower Wyke has already a strong family ministry with our Adventures youth group, Sunday School and various family focused outreach days.

### Data:

September 2025 - We had 22 none team members come.

November 2025 - We had 18 none team

members come.

January 2026 - We had 17 none team members come and join us.

We have a team of five core with one person happy to step in and do the Firepit when needed and another who brings down the hot chocolate when she can, which makes it one less thing for the team to focus on doing.

Of our families, some come from Lower Wyke connection, one family has a Horton connection, but some have no traditional connection to a Moravian Church. In January we had two new families come who haven't come to anything run at Lower Wyke ever before.

We have five families who have come more than once. It is, undoubtedly, early days. Yet we can see that even in the harshest of weathers we have had a good turnout of people. In our last session it was wonderful to have a family from Bailiffe Bridge join us, an area we are hoping to outreach to as a focus over the next year.

Things take time but Forest Church feels good. The team are brilliant, capable and relaxed, setting the tone well for the sessions. Families have time together to connect as a lot of it is very free, and our time at the end around the firepit whilst people have smores (marshmallows on chocolate biscuits) and hot chocolate is very restful and inclusive (with dairy free and vegan options always available).

### Would you recommend people giving it a go?

Yes, if you look at your context and see families turning to outside spaces as a preference. It was really interesting to have a new family come in January and say how good it was to have an outside event for families and as they left, they said see you in March. Our experience has been that God has blessed us in the people who have come and so far, it feels like a healthy expression of God's love for everyone. Being in God's creation makes it a very sacred space.

© Sr Claire Maxwell

**THE GATHERED STREAM**

Online Every Tuesday  
Starting 3rd of February 2026  
(except the month of August)  
7.30pm - 8.30pm

**A House Group of Gathered Moravians**  
led by Sr. Lorraine Shorten, Br. James Woolford,  
Sr. Sue Groves & Sr. Claire Maxwell

Email [james.woolford@moravian.org.uk](mailto:james.woolford@moravian.org.uk)  
for Zoom details

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays: Bible Study  
4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays: Worship  
5<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays: Recap and Refresh Week

BRITISH PROVINCE CHARITY NUMBER: 251211

MORAVIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND  
HISTORY AND HERITAGE SOCIETY

**ANNUAL COOPER LECTURE**  
11th March 2026 @ 7.00 pm BST  
online via zoom

The Moravian tradition of writing a  
**Lebenslauf (life story)**

SPEAKER  
**Rev. Dr. Jill Vogt**  
Co-pastor of the Moravian Church  
Herrnhut Germany

**Book now on Eventbrite:**  
<https://moraviancooperlecture.eventbrite.co.uk>

**MORYAC 2026**  
Training Opportunity for Youth, Family and Sunday School  
Leaders  
Theme: Cultural Preparation - how to prepare your church for a  
thriving youth and families ministry.

Hayes Centre, Swanwick DE55 1AU  
from 9th to 11th October 2026  
25 Places Available  
£50

2 spaces are being held for each congregation initially at  
booking.

If your Sunday School / Youth team is bigger than 2 we will  
attempt to accommodate you once we have established  
numbers.

To register initial interest please email  
Rev. Claire Maxwell: [claire.maxwell@moravian.org.uk](mailto:claire.maxwell@moravian.org.uk)  
There will be a form she will send you to fill in.

THE BRITISH PROVINCE OF THE UNITAS FRATRUM (MORAVIAN CHURCH), Charity number: 251211

How can we be advocates? There is one step we can each take every week. Rev Winelle Kirton-Roberts spoke about the World Council of Churches campaign 'Thursdays in Black'. On the WCC website (<https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black>) they state that 'We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets - in all places in our societies.'

Wearing black, or a badge, is a simple step we can each take to show our commitment to challenging all forms of violence against women and girls. Show commitment, talk about it, give others the space to tell their stories and together we will be taking action.

In her concluding comments Sr Jane Carter encouraged us all to take action locally: in addition to Thursdays in Black there is the 16 days of activism (the 2026 dates are 25 November to 10 December). Sr Jane was keen that we each go home changed by our experiences at the Consultation. It was indeed a powerful and inspiring event.



Throughout the Consultation fellowship was a constant thread that wove us all together. Our devotions were led by Sisters from each region, and the daily Bible study was chosen to inform our discussions. Singing was also an element that bound us together and we sang hymns and songs in each language. Our Sunday service was at a local Moravian Church where choirs of all ages sang with joy and filled the place with vibrant sound. The youth choir was traditional African music with a rock style, played on guitars and a drum. It was at that service we gave thanks to God for bringing all Sisters together safely and the Consultation was formally opened.

Meeting Sisters from across our Unity was a joy and an opportunity to learn about their lives and how they worship. In addition to meeting new Sisters, it gave a great chance to reconnect with those we had met previously and to grow friendships. Overall, a truly wonderful and life-changing experience.

**Sr Janet Cooper and Sr Mary Holmes**  
Fulneck



## World Day of Prayer: Informed Prayer, Prayerful Action

Our Saviour says, 'Come unto me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke on you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.'

These familiar words, from the Moravian Communion liturgy, are encouraging and hopeful. They also form the basis for this year's World Day of Prayer service: 'I will give you rest, come.' (Matthew 11: 28 - 30)

I am always struck by the fact that countries and texts are decided many years in advance by the World Day of Prayer International Committee and yet they resonate with what's happening in the world at the time of the service. The service in 2026 has been written by the Christian women of Nigeria, a country once part of the British Empire and only given its independence in 1960. As is often the case, being given independence and managing to achieve self-governance is often a difficult and painful transition. This has proved to be so in Nigeria. Although now a more stable country economically (it has the highest GDP of any African country), there are still many issues around gender equality of opportunities, abuse by foreign powers

of Nigeria's rich mineral deposits and continuing harassment of the population by terrorist groups like Boko Haram. In recent times the atrocities committed against religious groups in the north of the country have even reached Donald Trump's ears and he has threatened action. There will be no winners if this should happen; the innocent will become pawns in a political situation out of their control (as has happened in Gaza).

The service contains the testimonies of four Nigerian women: Chioma (the burden of insecurity), Beatrice (the burden of marginalisation), Jato (the burden of religious persecution) and Blessing (the burden of poverty and despair). Prayers and hymns support their words and experiences, and the altar display uses symbolism to further our understanding of life as it is for these examples of Christian womanhood.

May I encourage all those who can to attend a service at a church nearby. The WDP organisation has a very efficient website ([wwdp@org.uk](http://wwdp@org.uk)) on which can be found a map showing services across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Services are always held on the first Friday of March, in this case 6th March, and it is possible to find a time to suit those

retired, in work or at school. In my role as Field Worker for the North of England and Northern Ireland, I am always encouraged by the number of Moravian sisters and brothers who belong to WDP branches and who help organise the annual ecumenical service.

Although it may seem that WDP is only a once-a-year event, it is a 365 day-a-year prayer organisation started by women in Canada almost 100 years ago. Look online for the daily prayer focus, join the monthly Zoom prayer group (first Tuesday from 10am) or consider attending the YPray? residential weekend in October (details can be found on the website). Materials for schools, youth organisations and Sunday Schools can be downloaded from the website as can a Messy Church programme.

'And now, with you God, we look towards the future, trusting in your presence through the changing days. We pray that, as we love and serve our neighbours, the earth will ring with faith's increasing praise.'

**Sr Maureen Colbert**  
Moravian Representative on the WDP  
National Committee for EWNI

## Unity Prayer Day Offering 2026

The Unity Prayer Day Offering 2026 will benefit the **Moravian Unity Heritage Foundation (MUCHF)**.

The purpose of MUCHF is supporting preservation projects of historical buildings and other structures considered cultural heritage, belonging to the Moravian Church around the Unity.

The Unity Synod 2016 passed a resolution, directing a Moravian Unity Cultural Heritage Foundation (MUCHF) to be established. The Moravian Church is a living and vibrant part of the body of Christ. We are a Church Communion with 300 years of history. From the beginning, our Moravian forefathers erected buildings for worship and settlements and mission stations, in which Moravians dwelled and developed the Moravian way of life, liturgy. The structures were tangible signs of the Moravian Church witness to the world.

Many Moravian provinces today have properties including settlements, mission stations, church buildings etc. dating back to the 18th Century and later, which are considered cultural heritage of historical and sociological importance. As a sign of the significance of Moravian Church Cultural Heritage, the settlements of Bethlehem (Pennsylvania), Christiansfeld (Denmark), Gracehill (Northern Ireland), and Herrnhut (Germany) have been named UNESCO World Heritage. Several other settlements, mission stations and church buildings are considered Cultural Heritage.

The Moravian building culture and Moravian architecture are part of the heritage of our faith; and have been proven to be extraordinarily important to maintain, and valuable for society far beyond the limits of the Moravian constituency.

The provinces and congregations face challenges in restoring, maintaining, and revitalizing some of the structures due to financial constraints, due to lack of architectural staff, lack of sufficient knowhow concerning historic craftsmanship, conservation principles, national conservation legislation, possible avenues of funding, and knowledge of experience from other provinces concerning restoration issues of Moravian buildings.

The **Moravian Cultural Heritage Foundation** has now been established as a Unity Undertaking, and is governed by a Board, consisting of Moravian sisters and brothers from various parts of the Unity, appointed by Unity Synod 2023.

To fulfill its purpose, MUCHF needs to do as follows:

Hire an administrator, who on behalf of the MUCHF Board will work on:

- Identifying internal Moravian and external national and international funding sources and making efforts to establish working capital.
- Identifying and assembling a group of international experts in Moravian Architecture, Church History, restoration, historic craftsmanship, cultural heritage management and other relevant subjects to offer guidance and advice to the provinces.
- Establishing a central register of structures to be considered as cultural heritage within the Unity.

The Unity Prayer Day Offering 2026 will enable MUCHF hire an administrator, who will start working for the benefit of the Moravian Church Cultural Heritage around the world.

### Information to the Provincial Church administration

The Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF) gives the following directions of the Unity Prayer Day Offering:

#### COUF #801. UNITY PRAYER DAY OFFERING

- Once a year on the proposed Unity Prayer Day in all congregations of the Unity, a Unity Offering shall be collected. Monies received shall be sent no later than the end of June of that year to the Unity Office [Unity Board Administrator] who will administer the collected funds, distribute them to the recipient Province (Unity Undertaking), and provide a written report to all Provinces.
- The Board of the recipient Province (Unity Undertaking) is to formulate a report on how it intends to use the funds received from the Unity Offering and forward this report to all Provincial Boards by the first of November before the date of the Offering. Prior to November 1st, the Unity Board President should remind the recipient Province to send this important information. This report should be communicated to all congregations at least a fortnight (two weeks) before the date of the Offering in order to inform all members of the special purpose of the Unity Offering. (2016)
- The UMDB, on behalf of the Unity, determines the projects that will receive the Unity Prayer Day offering, taking into consideration that the allocations will be distributed as fairly as possible within the regions and taking into consideration which provinces have benefitted from the Unity Prayer Day offering in previous years.

**As a rule, the Unity Prayer Day Offering is taken in the beginning of March.**

**Please send the Unity Prayer Day Offering 2026 to the Unity Office:**

Danske Bank, Gravene 2, DK-6100 Haderslev, Denmark  
Account No.: **4452289385**  
IBAN: **DK-343000 4452289385**  
BIC/SWIFT: **DABADKKK**  
Account name: **Jorgen Boytler**

On behalf of the Unity Board.

Christiansfeld, December 31st, 2025

**Rev Dr Jørgen Bøytler**  
Unity Board Administrator

# Make the beds - Synod is coming



The glass vase presented during the 1957 Synod.  
© Moravian Church

At Fulneck we have a glass vase that is put out for the first Sunday of March, but who presented this to Fulneck, when and why? With the help of others, I have explored these questions.

In July 1957 Fulneck would have been buzzing. Over seventy people were arriving for a special synod to be held at Fulneck; hence, catering and beds needed to be arranged for folks. Seven were coming from abroad: Tanganyika (today Tanzania), USA (both North and South Provinces), Germany (both east and west), and Czechoslovakia (today Czechia/Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>). It is also worth noting that Br John McOwat attended this Synod as one of the two Fulneck deputies.

Imagine the discussions, questions about why, and who and what would happen? Here are some answers, drawn from articles written just after this special synod.



Bishop J Vogt (Herrnhut), Br Radim Kalfus and Bishop Karel Reichel (Czechoslovakia).

© Moravian Church

**Why, what was the purpose?** The 1956 Provincial Synod at Hornsey (London) had agreed that in 1957 there would be a special Synod. Its main purpose would be to celebrate the quincentenary of the Moravian Church: it would be 500 years since the Unitas Fratrum was established in Kunwald, Czechia. The Kunwald community was set up by Br Gregory, with the aim of living according to the beliefs of Jan Hus. The special Synod would be a fitting prelude to the Unity Synod which was to take place a month later in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: the first worldwide Synod since 1931, and the first to meet anywhere except Herrnhut in over two centuries of the Renewed Moravian Church.

## Who was coming from abroad?

The seven Synodals making the long journey from abroad included three from behind the Iron Curtain, a brave move indeed at that time. These included Bishop J Vogt from Herrnhut and Bishop Karel Reichel. Bishop Reichel was descended from an old Herrnhut family. In 1920 he had started a private bookshop in Prague and published many works by famous brethren. In 1939 he was ordained, by Bishop Shawe; horror then followed when both he and his wife were imprisoned by the Nazis and sent to Germany. Following their release, they returned to Czechoslovakia and by 1957 were working in Prague. The second person from

Czechoslovakia was Br Radim Kaifus.

**What was said?** Br Linyard, then of Gomersal and Heckmondwike congregations, wrote about the opening service. Based upon Revelations 2 verses 6-9, Br Foy delivered a sermon titled 'The Ground of the Unity - Jesus Christ'. He spoke of three things the church had learned from our Lord:

1. how to establish a unity of brethren. Here he spoke of the newness of the Kunwald community, saying it was 'beyond our imagination, the spiritual equivalent of the splitting of the atom'.
2. how to revive and renew the Unity of the Brethren, especially by bringing peace and unity to Herrnhut in 1727,

heralding the first Lovefeast service in August 1727.

3. then, he said, the church realised it could not just be a cosy group. The church learned that the previous steps set the scene for to the expansion of a worldwide unity.

Br Foy concluded by posing the question of how the church in 1957 could maintain and extend this gift of the Unity, in what was such a divided world. This is surely a relevant and pertinent question for us today.

**Will anyone remember this event in the future?** The answer is a resounding YES.

During the Synod Bishop Reichel presented Fulneck with a glass vase, inscribed with '1457-1957'. On 1st March the Moravian Church celebrates the Memorial Day as the forming of the Unitas Fratrum in 1457. On the first Sunday after this Memorial Day the glass vase is on display during our Lovefeast and Holy Communion service. Thanks to Bishop Reichel, at Fulneck we have a visual reminder of this first step in the creation of our unity.

And now for a final question: look around, do you have any items in your church that tell an amazing story. If so, why not share this story?

**Sr Mary Holmes**  
Fulneck

*I trust I have done justice to this amazing event and those who attended. My sincere thanks to Br John McOwat who first told me the story of the vase and to Sr Lorraine Parsons for the archive material about the Synod.*

1. Czech Republic and Slovakia split in 1993.

The following letter was recently published by the Provincial Elders' Conference of the Northern Province of the Moravian Church in America in response to recent incidents in the United States.

## Affirming the Church's Call to Justice and Public Witness

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

In February of 2025, the Provincial Elders' Conference wrote a Statement and Letter to the Church, which came to be known as 'The Compassion Statement'. It was titled *Humbly and Boldly Following Christ in Our Ministries of Caring and Public Witness* and its purpose was to offer encouragement and prayers to the church in a very challenging and difficult time.

One year later we are writing again, this time having witnessed immense human suffering resulting from numerous orders and policies drafted by and enforced in the U.S. and around the world in inhumane and capricious ways. Such policies have impacted basic human needs including health care, food, shelter, and education. As is often the case, the most vulnerable have suffered most.

We are especially alarmed and grieved at the inhumane treatment of persons and their families who are immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and those who care for them. Many people in our congregations, communities, and nations now live with constant fear and terror, the trauma of which is known to cause deep and lasting wounds, particularly for children.

We have witnessed the devastating loss of life, and the cruel treatment of children, youth and adults in the processes of detainment, arrest, disappearance, confinement and deportation. We have witnessed the increasing acts of aggression, violence, and racial profiling by federal law enforcement agencies in Minneapolis/St Paul, Minnesota, and in a growing number of cities and towns across the U.S. We join other people of faith in calling for the protection of human and civil rights of all persons; thorough and legitimate investigations of the deaths of Geraldo Lunam Campos, Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti; accountability; de-escalation; and prayers for all involved. We have also witnessed the rise of Christian nationalism and its active threat to democracy.

We reiterate resolutions from the 2023 Provincial Synod on immigration matters, joining the National Council of Churches (US) in its call:

*for a comprehensive solution to our immigration challenges that respects the 'Imago Dei' (the image of God) in all people, keeps our borders safe, and honors the diversity that makes our nation a great tapestry, and we affirm:*

*the worth, dignity, and inherent value and rights of immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and declare support for the humane treatment of any person coming across our borders, regardless of legal status.*

Affirming the Church's Call/2

As a province in two countries, we express our profound grief and disappointment in the threats and baseless negative comments directed at Canada by the United States. The U.S. has been privileged to enjoy a mutually beneficial and supportive relationship with Canada for many years, and it is being dramatically affected by those in the U.S. government pursuing an imperialistic agenda leading to a devastating loss of the longstanding cooperation of nations. Our siblings in Canada are searching for understanding and support as this stance by the U.S. creates fear and uncertainty in their lives. We call the church to prayer, to standing in solidarity with Canada, and to speaking out on their behalf.

We offer support for our clergy, ministers, church leaders, and congregations, and our ecumenical and interfaith partners, in their care, support and advocacy for immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers, and in their resettlement ministries for refugees. We call for adherence to court orders and to legal means for making program, policy, and funding changes and decisions. We continue to pray fervently for the protection of human and civil rights, respect for relationships with our nation's allies and sovereignty of nations, and adherence to international law.

We affirm the church's call to public witness and its prophetic tradition. In our liberty, some may discern Christ's call in this critical time as a call to recognize a higher loyalty to God and conscience, to protect and secure freedom and justice for all, and to preserve the democracy in which we are privileged to live [MCCL, ¶27]. In any discernment, we are called to do all things in love with the conviction that the day will come when truth and justice reigns. Even now, 'Our Lamb has conquered. Let us follow him.'

We abide in prayer for each of you and for all. May the church of Jesus, our Chief Elder and only Lord, be guided by love and mercy and unwavering hope in God's coming reign of justice and peace where all will live as one beloved community.

**The Provincial Elders' Conference**  
Moravian Church Northern Province  
January 27, 2026



# 'What I Believe'

- Moravian Messenger Editor Sr Sarah Groves  
interviews Sr Sally Ann Johnston

Sr Sally Ann is a member at Gracehill Moravian Church, and also the Synod Clerk, Gracehill Christian Aid organiser, manages the tours of Gracehill and has been closely involved in the World Heritage work at Gracehill.

## Tell us a bit about your background, family, education etc

Dad was in the Royal Navy and met my mum when stationed in Northern Ireland. I was born and baptised in Scotland. I didn't attend church till aged eight when we moved to Gracehill and had started to go to the Church Youth Club. I taught Sunday School, was married at Gracehill, joined my husband David's church briefly; then we came back to Gracehill where our children Adam, James and Owen were baptised. At university I studied Chemistry, Analytical Chemistry and completed PGCE. It was a challenging time growing up in Northern Ireland and teaching during the Troubles. One of my form-class, only 12 years old, died in the Shankill bombing which was the worst period in my time teaching.

I swam with the local club and travelled widely for competitions, notably a trip to Israel where highlights were swimming in the River Jordan and the Dead Sea which was more exciting than the pool! We also attended Mass in Jerusalem by accident. The service was in French and a beautiful experience!

## How and when did you come to faith?

Gradually and still on the journey. I was encouraged at university to hear a Methodist minister comparing coming to faith to crossing a ditch: you could run and jump but it was also possible to use a plank and go tentatively.

## Tell us about your working life and your time volunteering and how that has related to your faith

I love my job in the health service, different from teaching but no less challenging. It doesn't matter what you do, whenever you interact with someone it reflects your faith in one way or another.

Conducting and co-ordinating tours keeps me busy. I love connecting with those who visit and hope I am a good witness. The work of Christian Aid is so important. I don't mind the organising, but door-to-door collections take me out of my comfort zone, although it's a good opportunity to get to know people better.

## What do you struggle with?

Accepting that I cannot get all the things done that I want to, in the available time! The big questions; how and why! There is so much we can't explain and as a scientist I love explanations. I suppose that is where faith comes in ultimately.

## Have you ever been angry with God, and if so, why?

No, it doesn't seem to make sense.

## Why are so many people turning their backs on the Church? How can the Church be more relevant to people?

The Pew Research Centre completed a study of global religions 2010-2020. Christians are the largest global denomination, increasing but not keeping up with population growth and seem to have plateaued. I think in the West the younger generation are still as spiritual and perhaps more so, but maybe less attracted to traditional organised religion. Any hypocrisy associated with the church is a definite deterrent. We need a clear message and an attitude of love. I believe the Moravian emphasis on a personal relationship with God attracts people.

## How can our heritage help us as congregations and as a denomination?

It has great potential to increase the historically strong connections between Moravians locally and worldwide. The UNESCO inscription and work over two decades have already strengthened and developed these connections and friendships across the world. Our heritage highlights our common purpose and helps us on our journey of faith.

It gives us greater opportunity to engage with people across the world. People seem to gain so much from visiting and we are blessed to meet them; it's not all one way! We have many return visitors and an increase in newcomers from all over the world. It delights me how people from every background love the history and the warmth of the welcome. You can tell they feel it's something special, a place of faith. There is much interest in our denomination, which has so much to offer. It's satisfying to enlighten and dispel the myths but also a considerable responsibility to represent it accurately and faithfully.

## Some personal preferences - favourite film, book, music and why?

I love reading science and history, especially Moravian history obviously! The film *Love Actually* is a favourite as it makes me laugh but I particularly like the introduction showing footage of real people at the arrivals gate at Heathrow. The joy of meeting and the love between them is so clear to see. The narrator says: 'whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world ... general opinion seems to be that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that ... seems to be that love is everywhere'. It reminds me of God's love and that it is all around.

## The place where you feel closest to God?

Many places, busy or quiet! I was in Austria at the top of a mountain glacier where there was not a tree to be seen. The whole expanse sparkled white in the sunshine under brilliant blue sky; it looked like the top of the world. I thought it could be how we might imagine heaven!

## What inscription would you like on your gravestone or epitaph, if any?

Although it would be tempting to have something witty to give people a laugh, I think the Moravian way cannot be bettered: name, born, departed.

# CONGREGATION NEWS



© Sr Claire Maxwell

## Lower Wyke, Yorkshire

2025 at Lower Wyke began on a sad note as Sr Sheila Mallinson, following a life of faithful service, was called to higher service on 13th January. Having met and married Br Graham she made the giant leap of moving from the south of England to become fully integrated into Yorkshire life - a fact that she never stopped reminding us about! We thank Sheila for her enormous contribution to church life.

There have been many other changes throughout the year due to the hard work and new visions of some members. Merging the new with the old sometimes causes friction but working together is in progress. Coming together could be a theme for this update.

The usual round of Coffee Mornings started the year supporting the MWA, The Wyke Foodbank, The Men's and Ladies Fellowships separately. It is always good to share life's experiences over a cup of coffee!

We joined with our fellow Christians in Wyke at the annual United Service at the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Coming together continued as we celebrated at Pentecost, this time with our Moravian brothers and sisters in the District. The 'Come Alive in 2025' weekend was an excellent celebration when we joined together in singing, praying and eating (at a BBQ) always a good combination!

Lower Wyke Church is situated in the centre of a small hamlet surrounded by beautiful countryside but its influence travels far beyond what the eye can see. It truly serves more than the local community. If you are interested in sewing, keep fit, gardening or eating a hot meal with friends instead of alone, there are monthly meetings for you. Prayer and Bible Study are not neglected as House Groups have been formed following the Holy Habits programme where friends discuss and reflect on the message delivered at recent services while sharing food and drink in an informal setting. Lent and Advent Studies have also been integrated into the year where appropriate.

Our large well established social events still attract a wonderful number of visitors; The Art Exhibition and Festival Meal, Scarecrow Festival, Proms in the Paddock and Craft Fair are days not to be missed. The Fun Day and Heritage Weekend in September provide fun for the young and historical information for the not so young dating back over two hundred years.

2025 saw the introduction of 'Forest Church' - a time for the young to enjoy our outdoor space, experience nature at first hand and interact with God's amazing creation. Toasted marshmallows and hot chocolate round the fire pit are usually on the menu. Families attending have increased each meeting. How incredible is that!

As Christmas drew near, we welcomed The Choral Festival to Lower Wyke on what was an incredibly atrocious evening weather wise but with the strains of Christmas music and familiar carols filling the air we blotted out the weather and enjoyed an evening of warmth and fellowship. The Christmas Gathering, Christingle Service and Christmas Morning celebrations followed quickly. As we lay Jesus in the manger Sr Claire, dressed as Claudia Winkleman in a large hooded black cloak, brought us right up to date when she likened Mary and Joseph to the 'faithfuls' and Herod, of course, as a traitor!

Looking forward to 2026, new initiatives are still on the horizon. A new build housing estate offers the possibility of friends we have yet to meet and plans to strengthen our relationships with the local primary school are being discussed.

If you have a 'creative soul' a new monthly meeting invites you to pause and reflect on Bible Texts through painting, drawing and simple activities. Please join us if you can.

Certainly a busy year, trying to merge the old with the new, hoping to move our church forward and always keeping Jesus at the centre of everything. Don't give up! The future can look bright!

Sr Diane Thornton



© Sr Sarah Groves

## Gracehill, Northern Ireland

Gracehill's festive season was ushered in by the Moravian Women Association's (MWA) popular Coffee Morning at the end of November. The church was filled with warmth and welcome as harp and piano music set a gentle seasonal mood, while members of the congregation and the wider community gathered to enjoy an imaginative array of homemade festive delights. An outstanding amount was raised for MWA charitable projects, surpassing last year and reflecting the generosity of our church members and community.

In addition to the coffee morning, the MWA were pleased once again to coordinate the annual Christmas Appeal in support of Women's Aid. The congregation responded with remarkable kindness, resulting in an impressive collection of thoughtfully chosen gifts which reflect the compassion and care that continue to be a hallmark of Gracehill's wider ministry.

That same spirit of giving and togetherness was evident in the beautiful Carols by Candlelight service in early December. Candlelight, music, scripture, and thoughtful reflection combined to create a deeply moving evening, rounded off by a relaxed and enjoyable supper. The atmosphere was one of shared joy and quiet wonder as voices joined together in song.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, the children of Gracehill took centre stage with a vibrant and engaging retelling of the Christmas story. Their colourful costumes, confidence, and expressive storytelling brought fresh energy to the familiar narrative of Christ's birth. The presentation reflected both the children's enthusiasm and the dedication of the Children's Church leaders who guided them with such care and commitment.

Alongside the children's celebrations, our Youth Fellowship also enjoyed a memorable festive gathering of their own. Since September, the group has been thriving under a new and enthusiastic leadership team, and their Christmas party reflected

this renewed energy. A lively programme of games and prizes ensured plenty of laughter, and the arrival of a well-known fast-food favourite was warmly welcomed. The undisputed highlight of the evening, however, was a wonderfully chaotic Snowman dressing-up competition, which provided endless amusement and firmly sealed the night as a great success.

Christmas Eve saw the return of one of the most cherished services of the year: the Christingle celebration. Friends and families filled the church, the atmosphere bright with cheer and festive anticipation, and beautifully illuminated by the soft glow of dozens of Christingle candles. Worship was led once again by the ever-faithful Ballyduff Silver Band, whose music added depth and celebration to the occasion, alongside other instrumental and song contributions from members of the congregation.

The celebrations continued on Christmas morning with a family service of thanksgiving and gratitude, as worshippers of all ages gathered to rejoice in the gift of Christ's birth. There was particular delight as the children were invited to share their excitement, enthusiastically showing off their Christmas presents. The combination of music, laughter and fellowship created a truly memorable start to the day and a wonderful sense of shared joy and fellowship.

This season in Gracehill was made especially meaningful as we celebrated our first Christmas with Rev David Howarth as minister of the congregation. His presence throughout all the services and festive events was warmly welcomed, and it was a joy to experience the season together under his guidance. As he reflected on the celebrations, Br David said, 'I felt deeply blessed. In the singing of traditional carols, in shared prayer, and in engagement with people both young and old, Christmas 2025 in Gracehill was, for me, full of joy, wonder and blessing'. His words capture the warmth, fellowship and uplifting spirit that marked the season for all of us.

**Sr Ruth Johnston**

## Royton (formerly Westwood and Salem), Greater Manchester

Before we entered the season of autumn and winter we had a lovely visit from Sr Mary Holmes on 26th July. She gave a very interesting talk about her recent travels around sites in Europe linked to Moravian history. She visited Suchdol and Odrou, Fulnek and Herrnhut. This event raised £185.50 for the Moravian Womens Association (MWA) projects and included Afternoon Tea and a raffle.

We had lots of other social events organised by our church members such as Sr Beryl Healey hosting a Musical Interlude on 13th September. As usual, the music was very enjoyable and brought back many memories. It was again accompanied by a lovely Afternoon Tea and a raffle and raised £190.90 for Church funds. The Beetle & Bingo Night on 24th October was enjoyed by all and raised £161 for Church funds and of course the annual Christmas Fair was held on 29th November and was a great success. All the stalls were busy, and everyone had a good time. A grand total of £1,483.41 was raised for Church funds. Br Woolford thanked everyone for their fantastic efforts. On 4th December many members of the congregation joined together for a Christmas lunch at the Old Bell Inn in Delph. It was a lovely occasion, sharing good food and fellowship together. The Christmas spirit continued with Sr Janine Parkin who led our Advent Service, giving an interesting insight into her role in co-ordinating Religious Education in local primary schools and the initiatives she introduced for Advent. Sr Lisa Howarth once again led our Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on 14th December, including a new take on the 'Twelve Days of Christmas!' Our Christingle Service on 21st December was led by Br James Woolford. It was great to see so many people in Church, and everyone enjoyed the impromptu Nativity play. Br Woolford also took the service on Christmas Day, which included a little bit of magic for those in attendance. Thanks, to all who helped in any way to make the Christmas Services and celebrations enjoyable and meaningful. We also thank Br James Woolford for leading a Blue Christmas Service on 10th December. Sr Judith Wilson writes: 'This was our first experience of this type of service. It was a service of reflection, not just of the personal loss of the people gathered, but for all people in



© Sr Hannah Coope

the world who for so many reasons find Christmas holidays difficult. The service was an acknowledgement of grief, loneliness or loss experienced by so many.' On 11th January Br Peter Gubi joined us to conduct a memorial service to celebrate the life of Br David Mallalieu, who sadly passed away in May 2025, and was remembered with much love by everyone there.

In other news, members of the Church Committee renewed their Level 1 Safeguarding training in September, despite technical problems on the day! On 24th August, we were invited to join our neighbours at Trinity Methodists for Worship and a shared lunch, a time of fellowship and food. Our Harvest Festival service on 28th September once again provided a much-needed boost for the Oldham Food Bank. Thanks to everyone who donated items. Sr Lesley Benedek led a moving and respectful service on Remembrance Sunday.

Finally, although we are sad to see Sr Shirley Grattan retire from her role as a Sunday School teacher, we appreciate and recognise her many years of devoted service to the young people in our Church. We thank her and wish her well for the future and hope she liked her voucher. Three birthdays were also celebrated: Sr Annie Geary recently celebrated her 97th birthday, Br Rupert Osborne celebrated his 99th birthday on 6th December, and Br John Coutts celebrated his 80th on 28th January. Sr Janine Coutts brought cake to church so we could share on his birthday. We hope they all had lovely birthdays and send both them and everyone God's love and blessings.

**Sr Hannah Coope and Sr Gail Holden**

### Hurricane Melissa Appeal

The British Province is supporting recovery efforts following devastation left by Hurricane Melissa. To donate now, please contact Church House or go to [www.justgiving.com/campaign/hurricanemelissaappeal](http://www.justgiving.com/campaign/hurricanemelissaappeal)

### FROM CHURCH HOUSE

#### Provincial Diary for March

1	Provincial Prayer Day	Zoom
4	Church Service Committee Meeting	Online
5	Mission and Society Committee Meeting	Online
9-10	Provincial Board Meetings	Church House
21	Western District Conference	Brockweir
31	Synod deputies' credentials due	

### CONGREGATIONAL REGISTER

#### Confirmation

18th January 2025 Pamela Collins Bath Weston

### DATES TO REMEMBER

- 1 Founding of the Brethren's Church in 1457  
St David's Day  
Unity Prayer Day
- 2 Purim - Jewish
- 4 Holi - Hindu
- 6 Women's World Day of Prayer ([www.wwdp.org.uk](http://www.wwdp.org.uk))
- 8 International Women's Day ([www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com))
- 15 Mothering Sunday
- 16 Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Power/Destiny) - Muslim
- 17 St Patrick's Day
- 18 Ramadan ends - Muslim
- 19 Eid-ul-Fitr - Muslim
- 20 Spring Equinox
- 25 UN International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and Transatlantic Slave Trade ([www.un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday/](http://www.un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday/))
- 29 Palm Sunday  
Summer-time begins
- 29 Mar-5 Apr Passion Week Readings

### NOTICES

#### Fulneck Moravian Church

Please note that until further notice, any official correspondence for Fulneck Moravian Church should be sent to the minister, Sr Janet Cooper, at her current address of 1 Mayfield Grove, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4EE.

#### Bookkeeper Sought in the Yorkshire District

A number of Moravian Churches in the Yorkshire District seek a bookkeeper to work with them in matters of treasury support, including regular financial reporting as well as end of year forms.

If you are interested in this paid opportunity, please contact Sr Claire Maxwell for more information on: [claire.maxwell@moravian.org.uk](mailto:claire.maxwell@moravian.org.uk).

# Faith and Film:

How movies and cinema can teach us about God and our faith

## Rocky and Going the Distance - the ultimate underdog story

'Cause all I wanna do is go the distance. Nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed, and if I can go that distance, you see, and that bell rings and I'm still standin', I'm gonna know for the first time in my life, see, that I weren't just another bum from the neighbourhood.'  
- Rocky Balboa.

I often think of our church as the underdog church and have even referred to it as the phoenix church for its remarkable ability to sustain and grow in seemingly impossible circumstances. It went from a small community of people gathered with the intention just to live as close to God's will as possible, to being persecuted to the brink of extinction, to beginning worldwide mission work and spreading the word of God far and wide. Now, when we face challenges again, it's good to remind ourselves that we have gone the distance and overcome the odds before and that with God as our guide, we can do it again. That's why I've chosen one of the greatest underdog stories in cinema history to be the first subject for this new series, the 1976 classic *Rocky*.

*Rocky* follows Rocky Balboa, a small-time boxer and debt collector in Philadelphia who gets an unexpected shot at the world heavyweight title when champion Apollo Creed chooses him as a publicity opponent. Rocky trains intensely with the help of his gruff trainer Mickey and grows closer to Adrian, a shy woman who becomes his emotional anchor. On fight

night, Rocky's goal isn't to win but to 'go the distance', proving he's more than a nobody. He survives all fifteen rounds, earning Creed's respect and finding personal triumph even in defeat.

*Rocky* was released to little fanfare. It seems apt that in a film about an underdog achieving great things, that the movie itself had a difficult conception. The script was written by a then largely unknown actor Sylvester Stallone. Producers Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff loved Stallone's script and offered him \$350,000 for the rights, but Stallone - despite only having \$106 in his bank - refused to sell unless he could star in the film. They agreed, requiring him to keep writing for free and act for scale. When they brought the project to United Artists, the studio wanted a major star and only approved Stallone if the budget was slashed from \$2 million to \$1 million, with Winkler and Chartoff personally liable for any overages. The film ultimately cost \$1.1 million, forcing the producers to mortgage their homes to cover the final \$100,000. The film would go on to make \$225,000,000 in worldwide box office takings and spawn a franchise that would collectively take an estimated \$1.7 billion and make a lasting impact in the world of cinema and inspired millions of people who watched this story of a nothing boxer, who never believed in himself or had anyone believe in him, overcome the odds and go the distance with the heavyweight champion

of the world, Apollo Creed.

There is, of course, a boxer in the bible and he certainly knew how to overcome the odds and go the distance. St Paul, a man who describes himself as the ultimate sinner, had his life turned around by the grace of God and would face many battles and challenges as he set about fulfilling God's mission to bring the good news to fellow underdogs and outcasts. Paul writes:

*Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified. **1 Corinthians 9:24-27***

Whatever challenges we face as a church and as individuals let us take inspiration from the story of Rocky and St Paul that if we keep going, keep fighting, stay true to our roots and heritage and listen to our trainer and coach in heaven, we too will go the distance and win the ultimate prize. When life keep throwing punches and we don't know how we'll carry on then in the words of Rocky, (taken from the terrible fifth film), 'I didn't hear no bell!'

**Br James Woolford**

Minister of Dukinfield and Royton Moravian Congregations

## Corrections

It has been brought to our attention that a few errors were published in the last two issues of the *Moravian Messenger*:

- The last issue of the *Moravian Messenger* published, by mistake, two pictures on p.18 of Carmel Moravian Church, instead of Springfield Moravian Church which was the Church referred to in the text on that page. The online version of the magazine now has the correct images of Springfield Moravian Church on that page.

- Also, the February issue of the *Moravian Messenger* listed Mothering Sunday under the 'Dates to Remember' in error.
- The January and February issues of the *Moravian Messenger* had the incorrect year of 2025 printed on the front page.

We apologise that they could not be rectified in time for the printed copies but have ensured that they been corrected in the online versions of the magazine. Many thanks and appreciation to all the sharp-eyed people who contacted us when they spotted these errors.

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