

Pastoral letter: September 2025

Dear all,

Happy new Methodist year, it is really good to be journeying with you. I hope the summer has been a time of rest and enrichment. Welcome to all those who have joined the district, we look forward to working with you.



I was fortunate enough to spend a week away at Sheldon during August, a retreat centre nestled in the hills of Devon, a place of peace, quiet, worship and cake (which is always a bonus). Sheldon is a place that offers particular sanctuary to ministers, it is set in acres of woodland, orchards and they have a collection of rare breed sheep with whom you can become acquainted. I spent several days walking, reading and simply soaking up the deep peace of the place. I took the opportunity each morning to get up quite early and walk and for the most part I only came across the sheep bleating from one corner of fields to another. However, the day before I left, I wandered into some woodland on the edge of the site where the trails felt largely untrodden. As I went around a corner, I heard a crack in the bracken and there was a Doe standing just before me on the pathway. She didn't move for a few moments, and we simply looked at one another before she bounded up the hill and out of sight. It was a God-filled moment, a few seconds which felt longer than they lasted, a surprising encounter with a beautiful creature. It is a moment that has endured in my mind.

George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community, wrote extensively about the majesty of creation and how we inhabit the 'garden of God's creating'. We are now in the season of Creation-tide when we give thanks for the beauty of the world and the plenitude of our harvest. We reflect on how we care for and conserve the earth, each playing our small part. We express sorrow for the harm that we do and have done, praying that we will all learn to do better. We are reminded to tread the earth lightly, remembering that everything we enjoy is a gift.

Mrs Lesley Dent was recently appointed as our District Eco-Church Champion and she will shortly be writing to every circuit asking them to complete a survey about existing Eco-Church awards and other action already being taken for climate justice and caring for the earth. Please complete the survey and return it to her as soon as you can. Lots of churches are involved in Eco-Church work already, and there are many ways of learning from one another and offering encouragement for this work. We have set a district goal of achieving an A Rocha District Bronze Award which fits in with the wider Methodist policy of achieving net-zero by 2030. To find out more, please see here:

www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

<https://eangliamethodist.org.uk/we-care/environment>

Returning home from my retreat I found this poem by the late Canadian poet, Mary Oliver. It seems so resonant with my own experience that I've shared it below. We remain grateful for all we have and have received.

Every blessing,

Helen

“The Place I Want to Get Back To”

by Mary Oliver

The place I want to get back to
is where
in the pinewoods
in the moments between
the darkness
and first light
two deer
came walking down the hill
and when they saw me
they said to each other, okay,
this one is okay,
let's see who she is
and why she is sitting
on the ground like that,
so quiet, as if
asleep, or in a dream,
but, anyway, harmless;
and so they came
on their slender legs

and gazed upon me
not unlike the way
I go out to the dunes and look
and look and look
into the faces of the flowers;
and then one of them leaned forward
and nuzzled my hand, and what can my life
bring to me that could exceed
that brief moment?
For twenty years
I have gone every day to the same woods,
not waiting, exactly, just lingering.
Such gifts, bestowed,
can't be repeated.
If you want to talk about this
come to visit. I live in the house
near the corner, which I have named
Gratitude.
Mary Oliver
Thirst (Beacon Press, 2006)