

A service for 11th June, 2023 MHA (StF)

Introduction

MHA is the largest charity care provider for older people in the UK, founded by members of the Methodist Church in 1943. Today MHA supports 18,500 older people. Today we give thanks for all that MHA, with the help of supporters, has accomplished; we pray for MHA's residents and members and for those who work and volunteer in the care of others; and we add our voice to helping all older people live later life well through advocating and lobbying for older people in society and those who work in the social care sector.

Our theme this year is how we need one another to prosper and be happy, the importance of community and inclusion to the health of society as a whole. It is about sharing a part of one another's life journey.

Call to worship: Psalm 133 (The Message) – A pilgrim song of David

How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! It's like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard, flowing down Aaron's beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes. It's like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that's where GOD commands the blessing, ordains eternal life. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Graham Kendrick in 1977 and invites Jesus to our worship. We shall sing the first two verses of hymn number 30, 'Jesus, stand among us'.

1. Jesus stand among us

At the meeting of our lives;

Be our sweet agreement

At the meeting of our eyes.

O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here;

Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

2. So to You we're gathering

Out of each and every land;

Christ the love between us

At the joining of our hands.

O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here;

Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

© Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Let us pray.

Creator God, whose Word brought life to the universe, our life is in your hands. You are our Guide and Saviour, compassionate and faithful, who revealed your true nature through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the faith and power to seek and do your holy will. You give our lives purpose and meaning as you guide us through the darkness of the world with the light of your love. We rejoice that every day of our lives you care for us, nurture and protect us and though we sometimes stray from you, you don't abandon us, but seek us out and draw us close to you once more.

Let us confess and seek forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Lord of time and space, we acknowledge our failure to love and serve you wholeheartedly, by limiting your loving concern for our neighbours, for our unwillingness to trust you when we are called to serve others, for allowing our worldly concerns to drive you from our consciousness. Forgive and increase our trust in you. O changeless God, so we may play our part in healing some of the brokenness we see around us.

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your abiding wisdom, made available to us throughout the daily wonders of life. Lord Jesus Christ, you reveal to us the joy, challenge and opportunities of daily discipleship. Holy Spirit, help us to grasp in faith, the human and the spiritual within our journey full of years.

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, without the burden of guilt. In trust and faith we praise you for open ears and eyes to your voice of love. In trust and faith we praise you for opportunities to bring comfort, consolation and courage to others. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service as we journey on, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. John Bell is a frequent contributor to Radio 4's "Thought for Today" and believes in a social ministry. Their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads and this is no exception, being a Gaelic melody from the Hebrides. We shall sing the first three verses of hymn number 28, 'Jesus calls us here to meet him'.

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him

As, through word and song and prayer,

We affirm God's promised presence

Where his people live and care.

Praise the God who keeps his promise;

Praise the Son who calls us friends;

Praise the Spirit who, among us,

To our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him

Word of life and Lord of all,

Sharer of our flesh and frailness,

Saving all who fail or fall,

Tell his holy human story;

Tell his tales that all may hear;

Tell the world that Christ in glory

Came to earth to meet us here.

**3, Jesus calls us to each other,
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.**

**Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth.**

© John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (1958 - 2019)

We come now to our prayers of intercession.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your Creation and for the great gift of life, but more than these we thank you for loving us so much that you came to save us through Christ Jesus, your Son. In response to your grace, help us to play what part, however small it be, to build a better world by seeking justice for all-comers, by striving to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources rather than fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, rather than being divided by them. Help us to stand up against prejudice in any of its forms, remembering that Jesus in his own ministry was open to outcasts and Gentiles, offering them his love.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who hold authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace, rather than using force of arms to have their own way. Hear our prayer for an end to the war in Ukraine, to civil war in Sudan and conflict between Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem. We pray for victims of war, terrorism, prejudice and persecution: the families and friends of people who have been killed; those who have suffered life-changing injuries; others who are broken in mind and spirit; widows and orphans who are struggling to survive and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant them much needed support and steadfastness of spirit, so they may begin to rebuild their lives. Help us spread the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, so every life counts.

Spirit of healing, whose loving-kindness is boundless, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are.

Loving God, remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or who are facing broken relationships, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them.....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love in which you offer healing, courage, strength and peace.

Faithful, all-embracing Lord, we pray for those, full of years, yet empty of peace: intimidated by unfamiliar walls, faces and routines, haunted by loose threads and

unfinished business, fighting to hold together, body, mind and spirit. God of all peace, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of calm.

We pray for those, full of years, yet empty of purpose: unable to fill the void, left by absent friends and grown-up children; facing the losses of health, home and independence. God of all purpose, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of worth.

We pray for those, full of years and overflowing with joy: at one with beauty and inspired by love; whose hopes have, weathered many a storm and whose faces bear the wrinkles from countless smiles. God of all joy, through the example of our elders, grant us the courage to model contentment, resilience and grace for a new generation.

Hear our prayer for all who access MHA's outreach and services, for those who lead and guide MHA, for the managers, staff and volunteers who run homes and schemes day by day and for everybody who supports its aims through giving and prayer. May the fullness of your shalom be theirs now and always.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you and that the life of Christ may be revealed in all we do and say.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to shine the light of your love upon our sin-darkened world in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

We continue with a hymn about sharing life's journey. It was written and composed by New Zealander Richard Gillard. It took him more than a year to complete, for he wrote the first verse in 1976 and the remainder in 1977. I think it was worth the wait! We shall sing hymn number 611, 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'.

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,

Let me be as Christ to you:

Pray that I may have the grace to

Let you be my servant, too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,

And companions on the road;

We are here to help each other

Walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christ-light for you

In the night-time of your fear;

I will hold my hand out to you,

Speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping:

When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.

I will share your joy and sorrow

Till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,

We shall find such harmony;

**Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.**

**6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you:
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.**

Richard Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song

Today's reading is 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 12 to 27

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. Amen.

Sermon: *'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body'* 1Cor. 12:12.

Paul's first letter to the churches in Corinth was essentially a rebuke to a dysfunctional group of early Christians, who were engaged in a power game. The Corinthian Church had an extremely mixed congregation: slaves and freed men; wealthy, influential merchant women; Jews and Gentiles. Their differences in social standing, wealth and racial background led to enormous quarrels. One of the problems that faced the troubled Church at Corinth was the desire of many members to be exalted above the others and such exclusivity was threatening to tear the community apart. Arguments raged over the manner of worship: who was the best preacher, **{Paul, Apollos, or Peter}**, whether or not to observe Hebrew customs and festivals, the rules for sexual behaviour and the role of women. Even the eucharist was a shambles: they brought their own food and drink, but did not share it, so the wealthy ate themselves sick and became inebriated whilst the slaves stood by hungry and parched.

A major power struggle developed over the relative importance of gifts of the Holy Spirit: apostleship; prophecy; teaching; working miracles; gifts of healing; helpers; administrators and the ability to speak in tongues. Paul told the Corinthians these gifts were granted to build up the whole community, not to make individuals more important than their

neighbours. Each of us possess Spiritual gifts which when we use them builds up our church or community, but no single gift is more important than the others in Christ's eyes. He recognises and cherishes each of us for who we are as members of his body. As Paul wrote, Jesus celebrates diversity: '**Jews or Greeks, slave or free**', but not only the groups mentioned. As his body, we are called to welcome all-comers, irrespective of race, colour, politics, creed, gender, lifestyle-choices, wealth or poverty. Remember who early Methodists sought to save. John Wesley preached: '**all need to be saved; all may be saved; all may know themselves saved; all may be saved to the uttermost.**' The aim was and is to help people live life as fully as they can.

MHA was founded in 1943 as "Methodist Homes" by a Methodist Minister, Revd. Walter Hall, three years after he was due to sit down. Revd. Hall and a group of fellow - Methodists were concerned about the wholly inadequate provision for older people in the UK, who lacked the means of self-support in their retirement. In those days between workhouses and before the Welfare State was born, they would have been admitted to bleak Old Folks' Homes, or if they were living with a dementia, incarcerated in Mental Hospitals. Revd. Hall and his friends were convinced that all people are entitled to a decent quality of life at any age, including their declining years, so they opened their first residential care home for twelve older ladies in Wallington, Surrey, during 1945. They encouraged residents to be as independent as possible, to follow their interests as fully as they were able and to feel valued for themselves, irrespective of their physical or mental conditions.

In the past eighty years, MHA has expanded dramatically and runs eighty-six residential, nursing and specialist dementia care homes and sixty-five retirement living homes, some with twenty-four-hour care, caring for approximately 6700 older people. In addition, it operates MHA Communities, formerly Live at Home Schemes, across the country, for more than 11000 people over fifty-five, making the total of service-users nearly 18000.

This year's appeal concerns MHA Communities which offer a variety of social and online activities and services for people who want to remain in their own homes, but who need support and who may be isolated, lonely and vulnerable. MHA Community managers lead teams of carers and volunteers to offer befriending, telephone checks, assisted shopping trips, exercise and dance classes, life-skills, lunch and social clubs, social activities and online activities that were invaluable during the COVID Pandemic. The Communities are dementia-friendly, so there's something to suit people of all abilities. One of the aims in 2023 is to encourage and facilitate schools to interact with MHA Homes and Communities with intergenerational activities, such as music, singing dance, crafts and drama. Those of you with internet can see a You Tube video of children from Yeading Junior School and Northwood College for Girls joining members of MHA Communities London for such activities. Both children and adults clearly enjoyed the event and, most importantly they were left with an increased understanding of and respect for one another: effectively grandparents and grandchildren in Christ, they learned from one another. They enjoyed real well-being which is the point of the exercise.

We live in a broken society when children often don't see or mix with grandparents or older adults and where many older people don't have access to younger people. This results in both preconceptions and stereotyping of each generation, especially if the only point of reference is the Media which usually concentrates on the negative or sensational,

rather than the ordinary. The generation gap has rarely been as wide, as language, fashion, music, technology and appearance are markedly different between young and older people, yet we are all part of society. Jesus loves us all! John Donne, a Seventeenth Century metaphysical poet and Dean of St. Paul's wrote these words in Devotion 17 in 1623. I have modernized the language, but retained the meaning: **Nobody is an island, entire of itself; everyone is a piece of the continent, a part of the mainland. If a lump of soil is washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a headland were, as well as if a manor of your friends or family were: anybody's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for you.**

Despite our differences, we are one body and are dependent on each other if society is to flourish. We need to recognize and value one another, both young and older, as well as recognizing the lack of support that exists for those in later life, despite governments promising to fix the care crisis. As a church, or as individuals, we can join MHA in campaigning for fairness in social care, for if we don't the pledges will be forgotten till a crisis occurs. Finally, we can pray for the people who work in MHA homes, schemes and communities, the life blood without which the body will collapse, yet, too often undervalued and ignored. May God bless them and us, so we thrive in him. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Sydney Carter for the School of Southwark Cathedral in 1971. It was intended to be chanted unaccompanied, except by a tabor, and the simple melody was named after the Cathedral's Provost, Revd. Ernest Southcott, but has been misspelt in hymnals as 'Southcote'. Hymn number 476, 'One more step along the world I go'.

**1. One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:*
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.***

**2. Round the corner of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me: *Chorus:***

**3. As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know: *Chorus:***

**4. Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:***

**5. You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,**

Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus* © *Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}*

Benediction

May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who calls us to grow together in truth and love, descend upon us and remain with us forever. Amen