MORAVIAN MESSENGER

AUGUST 2026

Gracehill Resident Celebrates 100th Birthday

© Br David Johnston

George Albert Payne Spencer was born in Sutton-in Ashfield, England on 25th May 1926.

Aged 12, he obtained a Scholarship to the Training Ship Mercury based in Southampton under the command of CB Fry, the famous cricketer, scholar and athlete. He boarded here for four years and was appointed Head Boy his final year.

Aged 16, he enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1942 and joined the ships company of HMS Nelson in 1943 with the rank of 'Boy Leading Seaman'. Shortly thereafter, the ship was part of Force H, supporting the Allied invasion of Sicily.

He subsequently witnessed the handover of the Italian fleet and the acceptance of the 'Instrument of Surrender of Italy' by General Dwight D. Eisenhower on 29th September 1943, aboard HMS Nelson in Malta's Grand Harbour.

Returning to the English Channel, HMS Nelson played a significant role in the D-Day landings in June 1944, using its 16-inch guns, which were the largest ever mounted on a British ship at the time, to engage targets inland to support the Allied invasion force.

George was positioned on one of the highest observation points on the ship to look out for enemy aircraft. He recalls, 'I had the best view ever, I think, of the landings in Normandy. I had this huge pair of binoculars which were Japanese, lenses like plates. I found it very difficult not to keep looking to see what was going on instead of covering my position of checking aircraft.'

When returning to Portsmouth some days later to be refuelled, the ship was hit by a mine leading to the necessity of extensive repairs. As a result, George then joined HMS Montclare sailing in convoy via the Suez Canal, to Australia before going on to the Admiralty Islands where he celebrated VJ day.

On returning to UK, he underwent officer training and was commissioned sub-lieutenant.

In 1947 George was serving in the Mediterranean where he was involved in Jewish illegal immigrant patrols. During this time, he suffered an ankle injury and was flown back to the UK where he underwent an experimental bone graft. On returning

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Editorial

Holidays and Remembering

I nearly always write a journal when I go on holiday to anywhere new. I find it helps me to remember the people and places I have been and how I felt and what I saw. So, I have just been re-reading and typing up my notes from a holiday taken with my late husband and good friends in Austria in 2019. As I go through it the images of the alpine meadows with cows and bells, goats and ponies come flooding back and peace reigns in my heart.

This year I have been on a walking holiday in Normandy and as usual have written a journal about that time. I was staggered by the size of the German defensive points and the scale of what had happened on the Normandy beaches during the landings. I know that my notes will bring it all back to me in years to come and teach and inspire me again.

It is so easy to forget what we have done, where we have been, what we learnt and how we felt about things and places. I don't keep a personal diary, but I do try to take notes of important things, lectures and sermons because they go out of our mind so quickly.

Remember and remembering is a key idea in the Bible. The people of Isreal are called to remember when God has blessed them, when he has chastised them and when he has saved them. They remember and through remembering they come closer to him. This idea should carry forward for us and we should remember what God has done for us; how he has saved us or given us new life (depending on how you express your faith), how he as chastised you (or made you realise that you had wandered from him); and how he has blessed you. As we remember so we come closer to him and become more committed to his way and more determined to serve him.

There is of course the danger that this can then become just something we do for God, our actions bringing us to him. However, the converse is actually true. It is God who remembers the people of Isreal, he remembers his commitment to them, his covenant with them and his loving kindness towards them. This goes further in Hebrews 8:12 when God says he even forgets the sins of his people. We remember all the slights against us, but when we turn to God he forgets our slights towards him.

So, over this holiday period, and perhaps out of your regular rhythm, try to remember God, don't forget him or what he has done for you and, if you are away from home perhaps you could try to worship with God's people in a new place on that Sunday. But more importantly God does not forget you, he has your name engraved on the palm of his hand (Isaiah 49:16) and when you call on him, he will hear you.

Have a great August.

Sr Sarah Groves
Editorial Team

Gracehill Resident Celebrates 100th Birthday

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to active duty, he eventually joined HMS Sea Eagle in Londonderry, Northern Ireland where he also met his future wife, Jane Harris, whom he married on the 24th July 1954 while stationed in Malta.

George served in the Royal Navy for almost two further decades, with postings including Australia, Malta, Greenwich, Cornwall and the Clyde before retiring and returning to Northern Ireland in 1972, when the family moved to Gracehill. He completed his working life as a hospital manager in the Royal Victoria, Belfast.

Given George's fascinating life and military service the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office (NIVCO) very kindly offered to organise an event to mark his 100th birthday. Happily, this fell on Monday 25th May - a Bank holiday!

NIVCO is dedicated to supporting veterans across Northern Ireland by acting as a crucial link between veterans and the various support services available to them and so they were keen to highlight this good news story.

To mark the occasion George officially unveiled a plaque opening a new village pathway known as 'Castle Walk' linking the Moravian Settlement of Gracehill with the nearby Galgorm Castle Estate.

The commissioner's office organised a piper and Royal Naval officers, who along with dignitaries including the Deputy First Minister, Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Mayor & Mayoress, as well as family and friends ensured George had a memorable day.

And Georges advice for a long and happy life? 'Enjoy your life but pick your friends wisely.'

Sr Sally Ann Johnston
Gracehill

British Mission Board News:

South Western Tanzania

© Br Dimchui Rongmei

In March this year the BMB, with the support of the South Asia Mission Province and the Province of South Western Tanzania, arranged for Br and Sr Dimchui Rongmei to travel from his ministry in North East India to spend a year in South Western Tanzania on a ministry placement. Br Dimchui writes his first reflections.

Time has passed so quickly; it is hard to believe that a full month has already gone by. From the very first day, our time in Tanzania has been a truly wonderful experience. The people here are kind, gracious, and very helpful. They have thoughtfully provided all the basic necessities for our home, including kitchen supplies.

We have been assigned to a church in Itili, which is about 7 km from where we live at the Provincial Office campus. For transportation, the vice chairperson's official car is usually provided to take us there, and the church vehicle brings us back. Each day begins with a committee prayer meeting, and I have often been given the opportunities to share from the Word of God.

Although Monday is designated as our rest day, I have expressed my willingness to remain flexible, as ministry often requires. Even on Mondays, we are ready to serve as needed. It has been encouraging to see Dimjeng actively participating among the women. The church has even provided her with a blue uniform to wear during women's gatherings. I often accompany her to these meetings, which are held regularly on Wednesdays and Fridays, though we sometimes attend additional gatherings as circumstances require.

We have also had opportunities to visit church members in their homes, as well as the sick, both in hospitals and at home. Recently, I was asked to preach on a Friday, and the pastor appreciated the message. He then asked me to preach again on Easter Monday, which was telecasted.

As for our communication, as we are not yet fluent in Swahili, and our pastor does not speak English. However, I see this as a valuable opportunity to learn the language more quickly. Interestingly, people say that Dimjeng's pronunciation is better than mine, which has sparked a friendly (and positive) competition between us.

The pastor has kindly arranged suits to be tailored for both of us. Here, ministers typically wear a clerical (Roman) collar, which I am not particularly accustomed to. However, out of respect and appreciation for their joy, I am willing to wear it. I had one presented on my ordination, but it is oversized. The church has now had a Roman-style long surplice tailored for me.

This coming Wednesday, I am scheduled to speak at the Moravian University, and tomorrow we will be attending a funeral. In October, we are also planning to visit Zanzibar.

When we go out, people often greet us in Chinese, assuming we are Chinese, but we respond in Swahili, which usually brings smiles. At times, we are overcharged because we are foreigners, and overall, things are a little more expensive than in India. However, fresh vegetables are generally available at reasonable prices, and most vendors are honest.

Health-wise, I had a sore throat during the first week, which has now resolved. More recently, I experienced a severe headache, likely due to exhaustion and the seasonal weather change as it gradually moves toward winter. I am now well, and Dimjeng is also doing fine.

There is so much more we could share, but this letter cannot contain it all.

We understand that the South Asia Provincial Synod is approaching quickly, and you must all be very busy with preparations. Please know that we are praying for you. We will miss being with you, and we wish you all the very best.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support for our ministry. We are truly enjoying our time here. Please keep us in your prayers.

Many blessings,

Br Dimchui and Sr Dimjeng Rongmei

Eco Church Award

We are pleased to share that Bath Weston Church, Brockweir Church and East Tytherton Church have all received the Eco Church Bronze Award. This recognises our commitment to caring for God's creation through our worship, our church buildings and grounds, our community activities, and the choices we make in everyday life.

The award reflects our mission to serve others as a positive presence in our community. We hope it will encourage a sense of local pride and help more people see that faith makes a real difference - by bringing hope, care, and practical support to those around us.

Achieving this award also supports a Proposal passed at Synod 2024, which pledged the Moravian Church to commit to caring for the environment by sharing good practice across the District.

© Sr Sarah Groves

We are grateful to everyone whose efforts have helped us reach this important milestone.

This also makes the Western District the first Eco Church District in the British Province! Other congregations I am aware of have achieved Bronze (Leominster) and even Silver (Hall Green) awards which is amazing.

If you are interested in finding out more then please visit www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk and register your building. The survey will take you through a series of questions in five different areas of church and once completed will give you the relevant award. It would be amazing if we could become an Eco Church Province!

Sr Lorraine Shorten
Minister for Bath Weston Free Church (Moravian) and Bath Coronation Avenue Moravian Church

Gender Based Abuse

As many of you are aware a number of Sisters from the British Province attended the Unity Women's Consultation held in Arusha, Tanzania in January and February of this year.

It was acknowledged at the consultation that gender-based violence is a worldwide problem, occurring in all countries, including Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Sisters who attended the consultation committed to concrete action in their own Provinces to address this issue. As a result of this commitment, I (as the European Region's Unity Women's Desk Advisory Board Member) decided to bring a proposal to our Provincial Synod. Sr Jane Carter, who seconded the proposal and spoke about her support of 'Thursdays in Black' a World Council of Churches initiative to help end gender-based violence.

The rationale is that gender-based violence denies the Biblical affirmation that women and men are equally created in God's image and share equal value, dignity, and purpose in Christ: *"So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them ..." (Genesis 1:27a).*

The proposal was for:

1. Training in the recognition of domestic violence and how to support victims be made mandatory for all staff engaged in ministry in the British Province.
2. Training in the recognition of domestic violence and how to support victims be made more widely available to lay people in the British Province.
3. Congregations find and display resources, useful telephone numbers etc for children and adults who may be being affected by domestic violence.
4. Congregations consider supporting the sixteen days of activism (November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to December 10th, International Human Rights Day).
5. Supporting 'Thursdays in Black' (a World Council of Churches initiative) be promoted to congregations and individuals.
6. The Provincial Board and British Mission Board along with all provincial committees (including Moravian Women's Association and Men's Fellowship) examine their areas of work to ascertain if the committee can contribute to the recognition/prevention of gender-based violence and offer support (directly or indirectly) to victims of such violence.

Formulating the proposal was in many ways the easy bit. I learnt when I reached Synod that when speaking of gender-based violence in the home, the correct term is domestic abuse not domestic violence. Abuse encompasses a much wider set of behaviours than purely physical and sexual violence - coercion for example. I was happy to be corrected by Sisters who work in this field and know far more than me.

The harder bit was thinking about what to say in support of the proposal - I turned to data and statistics on gender-based violence. Gender-based violence can happen to any gender, but the data shows a significantly higher percentage of domestic abuse crimes of all types have females as the victim. The data shows the scale of the problem we face in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Government data for Northen Ireland which showed that in the 12 months from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026: there were 31,558 domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 6.1% on the previous twelve months.

Refuge, the charity which helps victims of domestic abuse, have a facility on their website which allows you to discover how many incidents of domestic abuse have occurred in any given area. So, I looked up data for every area in England where we have Moravian Churches:

- In Greater Manchester there were 71,818 reports of domestic abuse in 2025.
- In West Yorkshire (Yorkshire District) - the figure for 2025 is 77,436.
- In Greater London (Eastern District) - 155,061.
- In Derbyshire - 32,323.
- In Wiltshire - 11,942.
- In Avon and Somerset - 33,461.
- Thames Valley (Oxford) - 57,375.
- Bedfordshire - 15,304.
- West Midlands - 88,399.
- Leicestershire - 22,489.
- West Mercia (Leominster) - 25,242.

These figures probably represent only a quarter of the true figure as 1:4 incidents go unreported. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is happening in all our communities. Whilst at Synod many of us were enjoying the World Cup match between England and Norway. However, data shows that win or lose, when England are playing, reports to the police of domestic abuse rise considerably.

Apart from the damage being done to the individuals who are victims of GBV there is another issue which I think deserves our attention. Violence against women and girls is being used by the far right and certain politicians to increase division and fear in our communities. The narrative they tell is that women and children are in danger from migrants and asylum seekers.

The fact is that home sadly is the most unsafe place for a woman or girl - overwhelmingly perpetrators of sexual assault are known to the victim, mostly a partner or ex-partner (44.5%) but also family members (3%), or other people known to the victims such as friends, colleagues and dates (38%). Only 15% of perpetrators are strangers. In addition, boys and men are being drawn into being influenced by the manosphere - a network of online communities promoting a particular view of masculinity which is often intertwined with misogyny, anti-feminist views, and extreme or toxic ideas about male identity.

My aim in bringing this proposal to Synod was so that, as a church, we can be better informed about the facts of GBV, be more aware of our own blind spots; be enabled to better support victims of GBV; be enabled to counter harmful divisive narratives which seek to pull our communities apart; and finally, be enabled to promote positive ideas of masculinity to counter the dangerous ideas promoted by the manosphere.

I am pleased to say that the proposal was passed unanimously and that work has already started to provide some education to our church members.

Sr Janet Cooper
European Region's Unity Women's Desk Advisory Board Member and Minister of Fulneck Moravian Congregation

Focolare Part 2: The Unforgettable Fire

Like the Renewed Moravian Church, the Focolare Movement began at a particular place in a particular moment, and from there has gradually spread to have influence across the globe.

I came across Focolare through a friend while a university student at Leeds. A group of students met together regularly sharing experiences of living a particular verse from the gospel, the Word of Life. Joining with them felt like coming home. They were mainly Anglicans and Methodists, with a few Catholics, but the labels didn't matter: we all desired to follow Jesus faithfully. I felt the presence of God among them. God was scratching where I itched and feeding me where I hungered.

I learned that they were connected with the Focolare Movement and I was intrigued to know more about how it all began. It started with a group of about half a dozen young women in Trent in northern Italy in 1943. The second world war was raging and Allied bombing raids increasing. The women made sure to be together in the same air raid shelter, having with them a copy of the Gospels and some candles. The war had sabotaged their plans for the future: one lost her fiancé, another a house and another her university place.

They asked themselves 'what is there that this war cannot take away?' Their answer was the love of God, the presence of God with them, for whatever time they had left. As they studied the Gospels, certain things stood out. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name I am present.' 'I give you a new Commandment, love one another as I have loved you.' 'Father may they all be one as you and I are one.' 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' and several more.

One of them, Chiara Lubich, a schoolteacher, became their natural leader. They committed themselves to be at the service of their neighbours who had been bombed out or bereaved. They had developed the habit of choosing a verse from the Gospels, and attempting to live by it in radical, down-to-earth ways, then sharing together their experiences of thus encountering God. (They didn't know anything about Moravian Watchwords.) They called this the Word of Life. They began to pray together in specific down-to-earth ways. When the bombardment finally ended in May 1945 several of them discerned a strong calling from God to live together in a rented flat and help to rebuild the community around them after the devastation.

Although they had won the support of their bishop and parish priest, the wider church was suspicious: 'They're living the Gospel, they must be Protestants.' 'They share all their things and give away their surplus, they must be communists.' These young women appeared to the people around them to be on fire with love, generosity and a passion to serve God in their neighbours. Some called them 'Focolarine' ('women of the fireside') recognising the fire of the Holy Spirit at work in them. The nickname stuck. Such was their influence that by the end of the war about 500 people in Trent wanted to go on living the Word of Life together, so the fire kept on spreading.

Before long this way of living a communitarian experience of the gospel spread beyond their home city. As growing numbers of people committed themselves to this new phenomenon, it needed some structure and organisation. That small group of young unmarried Catholic women had become a community of all ages, men, women and children, single and married, from all walks of life forming one spiritual family. Chiara and some of her friends moved to Rome and set up a centre (a little bit like Herrnhut). An important feature of their life was a summer holiday together in the Dolomites which grew from a handful of people in 1949 to over 10,000 from 27 different countries in 1959. This became known as the Mariapolis, City of Mary. (Mary's role is to bring Jesus into the world.) Since 1959 there have been annual Mariapolises in lots of different countries.

Soon Chiara Lubich and her close companions were meeting people from Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed and Orthodox churches who wanted either to dialogue or to share their spiritual pathway. They began to discover that their way of life was becoming a Movement and that God had plans far wider and deeper than they could have expected or understood. In 1977 Chiara was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, an international interfaith award equivalent to a Nobel Prize. This opened up dialogue with people of many faiths including Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists.

My involvement with Focolare has continued to grow over the years. Its primary aim is the fulfilment of Jesus's prayer, 'Father may they all be one as you and I are one.' Its spirituality has influenced my work first as a schoolteacher, then as a builder and led to my discerning God's calling to become an ordained minister. It has magnified my understanding of Church and therefore of ecumenism. Oh, and it's been lots of fun and led to many deep friendships with the most unlikely people.

Br Martin Smith
Ockbrook

British Province of the Moravian Church invite you to join us for

A Day of Prayer

We remember the Beginning of Moravian Missions

Feel free to drop in and out of Zoom as your schedule allows

Friday 21st August 2026 from 3pm - 6pm on Zoom

Our theme:
The vision and mission today

Topic: Provincial Day of Prayer: Friday 21 August 2026
Time: From 3:00 PM (London time) until 6:00 PM

Meeting ID: 850 1962 6629
Passcode: 146440

Join the Zoom Meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85019626629?pwd=vaUP0q4hUp0UpEFuWeevBsSaS3gdhm.1

A journey to the Moravian Churches in India, 17th-23rd April 2026 - *Part 2*

Lathingkhal: Farewell by the River
© Br Erdmann Becker

Continuation of the article from last month's issue …

On Friday, 17th April, we travelled to Latingkhal in Manipur. We spent about two hours travelling together with Br Jacob and Br Nathaniel's family on the Barak River. Due to the rainfall, the water was brown in colour. Br Levi's father was already waiting for us in the boat that picked us up in Binnakandi and welcomed us. We experienced this appreciation for our visit time and again, and it shamed me deeply. Passing bamboo rafts and fishing boats, we entered the Jiri River, a tributary of the Barak River, which marks the border between the states of Assam and Manipur. In Latingkhal, a devastating storm with hail had struck on 15th March 2026, causing severe damage to many roofs. With the onset of the rainy season, swift action was required. Many people were forced to borrow money to repair their roofs. Thankfully, after consulting with the Board of Elders in Ockbrook, Br Joachim was able to pass on a donation of £500, which had been given by a group of Americans during a visit. We met the parents of Br Dimchui, who is currently serving for 11 months in the South West Province of Tanzania with his wife Dimjeng. The village is not large. People live off their livestock, the vegetables grown in their gardens and, of course, the rice cultivated in the surrounding fields.

The return journey was considerably quicker, as we were able to travel with the current. A wonderful dinner awaited us, consisting of rice, dal, yeast dumplings stuffed with chicken, beans, carrots, bananas, melons and apples. During the night there was a heavy thunderstorm and tropical rain pounded down on the tin roof.

We set off early on Saturday 19th April, to visit the Rubber Farm near Binnakandi. It was established as a church-run enterprise and initially generated a good profit, which was used to fund the construction of the church. Unfortunately, the price of natural rubber on the world market has fallen so much that the farm now yields very little profit. The area where the rubber trees stand in the dense forest is considerably larger than the farm itself. It is situated on a mountain and belongs to the church. Here, too, we heard ideas about what might be developed there. Perhaps a graveyard for the Moravian Church?

Church in Latingkhal *© Br Erdmann Becker*

Sunday 19th April was entirely devoted to the church services in Binnakandi and Silchar. The service began at 8am, and for good reason. It is not yet as humid as it gets later in the day. The fans were running at full speed, and the generator in the shed ensured a stable power supply, including for the microphone and electric guitar. Once again, the service began with about half an hour of singing. Many of the songs in the Rongmei language come from what was originally a Baptist hymn book. They also use a hymn book that they have published themselves. Despite the book and the projector, the next line of each song was read out loud so that everyone could really sing along.

After the service, we sat together for a while. We had lunch, and as always, there was some good tea. I often had the impression that, despite the ever-present mobile phones, time sometimes stood still and we simply savoured the moment.

In the afternoon, the congregation in Silchar was waiting for our visit. At the last synod, it was officially recognised as a church. Silchar is the capital of Cachar District and, with a population of around 180,000, the second-largest city in Assam. Many people speak Bengali. The members of the Moravian Church met in a flat; there were about 30 of them. We sang, exchanged greetings and celebrated Holy Communion together. The children were always present and sang for us some songs they had learnt in the Sunday school. A shared meal, a prayer for the children and a group photo brought the memorable gathering to a close.

In the evening, we met once again with the elders and the congregation in Binnakandi. Fish was fried in a large pan over an open fire. There was rice, vegetables and fruit, and words of gratitude were exchanged. As we were leaving, we accompanied a brother home to his wife, who has been paralysed for 15 years.

On Monday morning, 20th April, it was hard to say goodbye. Despite the early hour, members of the congregation were there again to bid us farewell. Br Titus and Br Nathaniel drove us to the airport in Silchar. And they did so even though it was Br Titus's first day back at school. We had already said goodbye to Br Jacob beforehand. I find it hard to find the words to describe how lovingly and thoughtfully those in charge looked after us and how well they tried to explain to us the society and culture in which they live.

We flew back to Delhi, where I said goodbye to Br Joachim. Whilst he was preparing for the Synod of the Moravian Church in South Asia in Kathmandu, I travelled on to visit Susan and Thsespal Kundan in Dehradun/Rajpur. I was a guest there for two days, got to know the Moravian Institute, visited the church and took part in a prayer meeting of the congregation in a flat. There I also met Br Bir, who had been part of the 'Study Group' mentioned at the beginning. Once again, the welcome was very warm and it felt a bit like home to me. At the school, I also met staff and students from Assam, and it became very clear to me just how significant a role the Moravian Institute plays in the development of the congregations in Assam and Manipur.

The Daily Watchwords accompanied us every day. For me, as a former editor of the Watchwords, this was always a special moment. We read the words in Rongmei, Hindi, English and German. It inspired us in our prayers and devotions. We heard from people living in difficult circumstances who felt strengthened by the Daily Watchwords. As I set off for Delhi airport on 23rd April, the Watchword read: 'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.' (Ephesians 3:14-15). Filled with great gratitude towards this Father in heaven for the many precious encounters and for His protection along the various journeys, I flew home. And now I carry these experiences with me, hoping to spark interest in our congregations and among my circle of friends. Naturally, one considers how and where one can support the brothers and sisters. But the most important thing, which we have assured one another of in every congregation, is mutual prayer to our common Father in heaven.

Br Erdmann Becker
Retired Pastor,
Kelheim, Bavaria

Reverend Lorraine Shorten Appointed Chaplain to Bath's New Mayor

The sound of church bells, the colour of ceremonial robes and the sight of a civic procession winding through Bath's historic streets made for a memorable day on Saturday 6th June 2026. For Revd Lorraine Shorten, Minister of Weston Free Church (Moravian) and Coronation Avenue congregations, it also marked the beginning of an important new role as Chaplain to the newly elected Mayor of Bath, Councillor Ruth Malloy.

The Right Worshipful Mayor of Bath, Councillor Ruth Malloy, with Revd Lorraine Shorten, who has been appointed Mayor's Chaplain for 2026-27, at the civic reception following the Election of Mayor Ceremony.
© Br Chris Shorten

The occasion was the Election of Mayor Ceremony, held in the magnificent setting of Bath Abbey, where centuries of civic tradition met modern public service. The day began at Bath's Guildhall, where the Charter Trustees - the 28 councillors elected to represent the city's wards on Bath & North East Somerset Council - gathered for robing before taking part in one of Bath's most treasured annual traditions.

Soon afterwards, the long civic procession wound its way through the city, cheered on by crowds of onlookers. The Avon Fire & Rescue Ceremonial Drill Squad formed an impressive Guard of Honour, while the Abbey bells rang out across the city. The 93 (City of Bath) Squadron RAF Air Cadet Marching Band escorted civic dignitaries to the Abbey, and music from the City of Bath Brass Band added to the celebratory atmosphere.

Bath Abbey, famous for its fan-vaulted ceiling and rich heritage, provided a fitting backdrop for the ceremony. Before the seated officials, Lorraine was invited to the Abbey lectern to lead prayers and offer words of reflection beneath the Abbey's impressive stone arches.

The ceremony saw Ruth Malloy become the 799th Mayor of Bath, a role that can trace its origins back almost 800 years to 1230. As Bath is a city, its civic leader holds the distinguished title of 'The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Bath'. The Mayor serves as Chair of the Charter Trustees and acts as an ambassador for the city, representing Bath at civic, charitable and community events throughout the year.

For Ruth, becoming Mayor is the latest chapter in a long record of public service. A Liberal Democrat councillor for Weston Ward since 2019 and Deputy Mayor during 2024-25, she is widely respected for her commitment to community life. Her mayoral theme, 'Community, Culture and Curiosity', reflects her passion for local history, World Heritage issues, libraries, museums and lifelong learning. She is also well known at Weston Free Church (Moravian), where she regularly volunteers at the popular Love Weston Café.

Lorraine will support Ruth in her new duties throughout the year. The unpaid role of Mayor's Chaplain extends far beyond ceremonial duties. Lorraine will provide spiritual guidance, say Grace at civic dinners and attend important occasions such as Remembrance Sunday. She will also serve as a bridge between the Mayor and Bath's diverse faith communities, helping to promote understanding, inclusion and mutual respect.

Reflecting on her appointment, Lorraine said: 'The theme of 'Community, Culture and Curiosity' resonates strongly with me. Community reminds us that we belong to one another, culture helps us cherish the gifts and stories that shape us, and curiosity opens our hearts and minds to new possibilities. I am honoured to support the Mayor as we seek to embody these values in the life of our city.'

As the newly elected Mayor and her Chaplain returned in procession to the Guildhall for a reception, the symbolism was unmistakable. One represented the civic leadership of a city with a proud history stretching back nearly eight centuries; the other a ministry rooted in service, compassion and faith. Together, Ruth Malloy and Revd Lorraine Shorten begin a year dedicated to strengthening community life and celebrating all that makes Bath such a remarkable city.

Br Chris Shorten
Weston Free Church (Moravian)

'What I Believe'

Moravian Messenger Editor Sr Sarah Groves interviews Br Christopher Shorten

© Sr Sarah Groves

Br Christopher was the reserve Chair of Synod this year and is a member at Weston Free Church (Moravian) in Bath. He has served on both the Finance and Property Committee and the Archive and Heritage Committee, and is married to Revd Lorraine Shorten.

Tell us a bit about your background, education and family etc.

I grew up near Gomersal, West Yorkshire and was educated at Heckmondwike Grammar School. I'm currently studying for an Arts and Humanities degree at the Open University, specialising in History and Creative Writing. I also hold a Financial Diploma. My interests are a mixture of the analytical and practical, creative and reflective. My life's been shaped by the people around me. My family has always been important, and I'm grateful for the support, encouragement and perspective they bring to my life.

How and when did you come to faith?

My journey to faith began through the Boys' Brigade at Gomersal Moravian Church, and in school assemblies. It wasn't always a clear path, but over time I recognised God was active in my life, even when I didn't appreciate it at the time.

Tell us about your life and work

Naturally, I spend much of my time studying. I try to support Lorraine in her ministry and in encouraging our children to fulfil their life choices. I was fortunate to be able to retire early. My work involved serving others as an advisor to high-net-worth clients at an international bank. At other times I've been a pensions administrator and compliance officer. The aspects I enjoyed and miss the most are the ordinary day-to-day conversations, learning about people's hopes and dreams and - in my own small way - helping to turn them into reality.

What do you struggle with in your personal faith and what gives you strength and comfort?

I'm struggling a little with these questions, because my faith is very personal to me, and often quite emotional. Perhaps this is why study appeals to me; putting thoughts and feelings down on a page and seeing what emerges from God's guidance. Like many people, I also struggle with doubt and patience. What nourishes me is seeing God's strength in others, even when my own faith feels weak. Worship in its many forms and the support of a congregation are a great source of comfort. Although my faith is personal to me, it is not something to carry alone. It is something we share as part of a community, seeking to follow God together.

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

Not angry, but impatient. There have been times when I've wrestled with prayers which appeared to go unanswered. Those experiences remind me to be honest to myself, to others, and to trust in God.

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

Are they? Or, is it that people are rejecting institutionalised forms of Church, not necessarily faith itself. I think some of this comes back to honesty. People shun the Church for many reasons: disappointment, hurt, changing beliefs, busy lives or the feeling that the Church doesn't have anything to offer them anymore.

For me, the Church is most relevant when it reflects Christ. Love, humility, authenticity and compassion in the community should not fall under the shadow of governance. Churches need organisation, but this should support mission rather than overpower it. It's easy for a Church to lose sight of the people it is called to serve. The Church may best find relevance in the way it supports and serves communities, rather than in its procedures.

What can we learn from those of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds?

Different cultures reveal different aspects of God's creativity. They remind us that the Church is far bigger and more diverse than our own limited experience.

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

Gosh. These are always changing. Ask me again next week and I'll probably give you a different answer.

Film - *Glory* (1989) is the one I return to when I have some spare 'me' time; epic, powerful, moving. If I'm being honest, *Mamma Mia!* (2008) is my uplifting secret guilty pleasure.

Book - *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994). Maybe because of the historical setting, as my grandfather was a machine-gunner in Greece during the war. I haven't re-read it in a long time, but it's the only book I remember where I laughed out loud reading one paragraph, then cried at the next.

Music - Anything by the *Electric Light Orchestra*. I have an eclectic collection of CDs and am always on the lookout for different genres. When I'm studying or writing, I prefer to play classical music in the background - but don't test me on them.

The place where you feel closest to God?

With Lorraine and our family, and a nice cup of tea.

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

My name and dates will be enough.

Report of the Provincial Men's Fellowship Day 2026

We met once more at Ockbrook, thanks to the hospitality of Br Joachim and the Ockbrook Congregation, we were met with a welcome cup of tea or soft drink on that hot summer's day.

For the first year we had decided to share the afternoon on Zoom to include more of the brethren of the Province, which didn't really work because there were 13 gathered at Ockbrook and three on Zoom.

We had chosen for our theme 'Men of the Church', men particularly from the British Province.

Included in the opening devotions led by Br Evans was a 40-year reflection of the Men's Fellowship, an abridged version of which will be published in the next issue of the 'Moravian Messenger'.

The first of the talks was given by Br Evans and he spoke about the hymn-writer James Montgomery, who had spent a good deal of his life in Yorkshire including Fulneck and Wellhouse. Br Mallinson then spoke about Rev James Gibson Ward who was a missionary in the West Indies as well as establishing a Church in Australia. James was educated at Mirfield and Fulneck and at the Fairfield College. James died of a fever whilst serving in Mapoon, Australia and is buried in God's Acre at Lower Wyke. Sr Lorraine Parsons then spoke to of the life of Dr and Mrs Keevill who served in Tanzania establishing the hospital and medical work in Sikonge and in Tabora, helping with the training and education of future doctors and nurses. These are very abridged versions of the talks, and hope to publish the full versions in later issues of the 'Moravian Messenger'.

After the talks we joined with a local group from Ockbrook at the Well dressing at the rear of the Church, this year their theme in the dressing was 'Over the Wall' and we were told something of the work and how within the week or so the first children and their families would be arriving.

As is our custom, we sang together the Men's Fellowship Doxology, and met around the Lord's Table for Holy Communion, led for us by Br Joachim.

It was once again an enjoyable time of fellowship, and learning, my hope is that long may it continue, but that is down to the wish and support of the Brethren.

Br Kenneth G. Evans

CONGREGATION NEWS

Fetter Lane, London

- Summer update

June and July flew past with the grass on the Fetter Lane burial ground turning from lush green after 'no mow May' to a crispy brown, following days of 30C+ heat. We began the summer by joining with sisters from Hornsey, Harlesden and Harold Road to welcome to Sr Gillian Taylor, the Moravian Women's Association President. Before her interesting talk linked to the MWA theme of Jesus the Storyteller, many of the sisters met to share a convivial lunch and catch-up. We London sisters agreed that we should get together more often.

Later in the month we had the second of four talks in our series, 'Across Seas and Centuries', this time delivered by Br Livingstone Thompson whose talk was entitled 'Planting in Bogue; Sugar and Moravian Settlement in Jamaica'. The talk attracted 25 attendees, some with links to Jamaica and others simply with an interest in Caribbean history and some of the issues that remain current.

At the end of the month, we tried our own version of Messy Church, examples of which have featured in the 'Moravian Messenger'. Br Michael Newman developed a children's talk around the story of Daniel and the lion, asking us all to think about times when we've been scared and what has helped us. We combined this with some crafts activities and a few songs. The feedback from the families who joined us was positive and gave us some ideas for the future.

© Sr Cynthia Dize

Finally, at our regular Friday openings when we welcome local regulars for tea and chat as well as tourists from all over, we got a surprise visit from Felix Graf (Count) von Baudissin-Zinzendorf and his young nephew Max, aged 19, who was on his first visit to London. Moravian Close is full of historical links as our history talks show, but Felix and Max took us right back to the beginning of Moravians in London.

Best wishes for the rest of the summer from all at Fetter Lane.

Sr Cynthia Dize

Ockbrook, Derbyshire

We have had a busy spring and early summer, here in Ockbrook, and things are about to get even busier!

The 17th May saw a very well attended family service, where it was a delight to see so many young people participating. The emphasis on youth continued, on June 7th, with the baptism of baby Edward Charles John Boulton-Flint, who behaved, beautifully, throughout, despite his tender years! His mother, Charlotte, spoke movingly about the personal challenges that she had met and survived on her journey to motherhood, and the occasion was a joyous one, all round. The following week, young Christopher Mack, was simultaneously baptised and christened. Chris told us of his road to faith, and demonstrated his skills in coding, with an animated screen presentation, depicting his baptism. Welcome Chris!

© Sr Jayne Brewster

On 27th June, we welcomed guests, for the Provincial Men's Celebration, which also included Joachim's blessing of the well behind the church, as part of the local 'well dressing'. An ancient Derbyshire tradition, this year it involved not only its creators, 'Ockbrook in Bloom', but also out new neighbours, the 'Over the Wall' charity, who will shortly be hosting their first camps for children with health challenges and disabilities, in the former Ockbrook School. The Settlement is certainly springing back to life!

We are now busily completing our plans for the 'Summer on the Settlement' event, upcoming on August 8th, when we are looking forward to hosting our friends from Germany, 'Moravian Brass'. Everyone is welcome to join us. The event is free (apart from a two-course evening meal, to bid farewell to our visitors, which will carry a charge of £15 per person). The event will also feature heritage presentations, and traditional Moravian baked goods. It's never a Moravian occasion, without food!

Sr Jayne Brewster

Ballinderry, Northern Ireland

© Victoria Jackson

May and June were very busy months for the church at Ballinderry. The usual activities of Scouts, Bible Study, Tai Chi, Book Club and Community Coffee Morning continued. In addition, volunteers tackled lots of practical work inside and outside the church building: cleaning the inside walls and rejuvenating the porch; erecting a new Moravian Church sign at the village crossroads; digging a new drain and renewing the path in front of the manse. It's all looking much improved!

The manse renovation project, which started last Autumn, is now almost complete. Following substantial internal building work, a new kitchen and bathrooms have been fitted, tiles and carpets laid and painting nearly finished. As with all old buildings, there have been some minor hitches, but these have been largely solved with expert professional advice and practical help from some volunteer friends of the church.

On the morning of Saturday 6th June, the Irish District Council met in the church building. As well as conducting their business, members were able to appreciate the work done in the church building and the manse. After a hearty lunch, we were privileged to host a concert performed by brass choir players from all over Germany. 'Moravians on Tour' accompany worship services and perform at funerals, birthday celebrations and other events. They gave only three concerts in Ireland during their visit, and we were honoured to welcome them to Ballinderry for their second concert. The lively programme of 15 pieces was greatly enjoyed by all. Unfortunately, the weather was wet, so we could not hold the concert outside, but spirits were definitely not dampened, and the afternoon was a huge success.

Srs Marilyn Marshall & Dorothy McMillan

Fulneck, Yorkshire

Easter and Pentecost are a distant memory as 2026 moves ahead at pace, mid-Summer Day almost within reach.

Fulneck Congregation celebrated Easter in time-honoured fashion - an early morning service in God's Acre, followed by breakfast in the Boys Brigade HQ before a return to Church at 10.30am. Once again, it was lovely to welcome some younger faces to our Easter services. All were brought up attending Fulneck - both Church and School - but now live too far away to be regular attenders.

© Bruce Newton

Talking of younger people, on the Saturday immediately before Holy Week, Church member, Kwame Bailey celebrated his 18th birthday with a party at the Comenius Centre theatre. With around 70 guests, it was a lively evening with dancing quite literally 'to the midnight hour'. Among the throng on the dance floor was Kwame's cousin, chart topping musician, author and guest curator of this year's Cheltenham Jazz Festival, Corinne Bailey-Rae.

April also saw the reopening of Fulneck Museum for another summer season. The Deputy Lord Mayors of Leeds, Councillors Carol and Barry Anderson officially opened the museum in April. They both showed great interest in many of the exhibits. This year there's an art exhibition of work by our artist in residence, Bruce Newton. Bruce, a retired painter and decorator has lived in the Settlement for 20 years and, over that time, has completed a portfolio of work focusing on Fulneck.

Back in Church, Fulneck is something of an outlier in marking Ascension Day. Often over-looked, it's an important day in the Church calendar. It also provides an all too rare opportunity for an evening service which, to my mind, is a wonderfully contemplative time of day, worshipping as the shadows lengthen and the bustle of the day is done.

May is a busy month in the life of the Church. The Sisters' Festival took place on the 10th; guest preacher was Sr Gillian Taylor. This was closely followed by our Church's anniversary Sunday on 17th May, former Fulneck School Principal Trevor Kernohan leading the service.

In the same month, thanks to the generosity of the Comenius Foundation - a fund originally established to support pupils at Fulneck School - Church benefited from a wonderful new carpet and pew runners. The Foundation has also given funds to the museum for building work and to the Drama Group, the latter using the money to upgrade lighting to meet current theatre standards.

The Drama Group ended their 2025/2026 season with a world premiere - a production written and directed by one of its members, William Lindley. 'The Suspicions of Ernest Strange' played to full houses and received much positive feedback.

Fulneck School Alumni will be welcoming around 100 guests to its Summer Reunion. Whilst tours of the School buildings can no longer take place, former pupils will still be able to walk the delightful School grounds, look at archive photos in the West Hall and visit the Church, Museum and Theatre. Over 100 responded to the invite.

Looking a little further ahead, into the summer months, one of our regular Church organists, the internationally renowned Lee Ward, is reintroducing regular monthly organ recitals.

Br Dave Robbins

FROM CHURCH HOUSE

New Provincial Board

Following the Provincial Synod held from 9th-13th July, the members of the Provincial Board are:

- Stipendiary (full-time) members: Sr Roberta Hoey and Br Michael Newman
- Non-stipendiary (part-time) members: Sr Jane Carter, Br Philip Cooper, Sr Carmen Warner and Br Livingstone Thompson

Synod and the Provincial Board expressed its sincere thanks to Br David Howarth and Br Edwin Quildan as they conclude their service on the Provincial Board.

Church House

Synod and the Provincial Board also thanked all those who have worked at Church House, Muswell Hill in London over the years, with particular appreciation for Gladys Korsah, Graeme Salt, and Sharon Salt, who will be leaving us when the office closes for the final time on Friday 28th August. A service of thanksgiving will be held in the chapel at 12 noon - all are welcome including former staff and Provincial Board members, but please let us know by email (office@moravian.org.uk) or by telephone (020 8883 3409) if you would like to attend.

From Tuesday 1st September, the temporary location of Church House will be the former Senior School at Fulneck until refurbishment of the old Robinson building has been completed - that will be the permanent location of Church House. The new address from September will be: Moravian Church House, Fulneck, Pudsey, West Yorkshire, LS28 8NT.

Cara Dyer has been appointed Finance and Operations Manager (cara.dyer@moravian.org.uk), and Chantal Erasmus (office@moravian.org.uk) is the new Administrative Support Officer to Church House.

Lorraine Parsons continues as Provincial Archivist and will remain based at Muswell Hill until the archive facilities at Fulneck are ready.

Provincial Diary for August

21	Provincial Day of Prayer	Online
28	Closing service	Moravian Church House, Muswell Hill

CONGREGATIONAL REGISTER

Deaths

1st June 2026	Joyce Lewis	Dukinfield
9th June 2026	Keith Copland	Baildon
2nd July 2026	Percy Maragh	Hornsey

DATES TO REMEMBER

13 Manifestation of the of the Spirit at Herrnhut in 1727
21 The beginning of the Moravian Missions in 1732
23 UNESCO International Day for Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
(www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/srd/ or https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/18)
25 Prophet's Birthday - Muslim
28 Raksha Bandhan - Hindu

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***

NOTICES

Faith and Film:

When Micheal Bond spotted a lonely bear in a toy shop on Paddington station on Christmas eve 1956, he could hardly dared dream the impact it would have on his life and the world as this little bear served as inspiration for his books that taught the world the importance of kindness, looking after strangers and of marmalade sandwiches.

'Paddington' was made into a series of twenty-nine books, a tv series, a new musical and of course a series of highly successful films. For this article, because it's Faith and Film, I will be focusing mainly on the 2014 film, starring Ben Whishaw as the voice of the titular bear.

One of the defining characteristics of Paddington is that image of him alone on the station with just a hat, left for him by the explorer, and a note around his neck saying, 'Please look after this bear'. It was inspired by the many powerful images of children fleeing the bombing of major cities during the second world war as they left on trains headed for the countryside. They left the comfort of family and home in the search for safety. I can hardly imagine how hard it must have been for not only the children themselves but the parents who had to wave them goodbye.

Paddington is raised by his Uncle Fastusio and Aunt Lucy who tell Paddington all about the explorer from London who found them and taught them how to speak English and all about having good etiquette and what a wonderful city London is. A place where you can always find a warm welcome and you will always find a home. When tragedy strikes and his uncle is killed during a storm, Aunt Lucy sends Paddington to London to find safety and a new family.

Paddington's expectations of a warm welcome are soon hit with the crushing reality of modern London, where nobody stops and says hello and they walk on by as he asks for help on the station platform. Only Mrs Brown stops and offers assistance, much the reluctance of the far more cautious Mr Brown who worries about the damage having a bear in the house could cause. Whilst in his new home Paddington becomes a part of the family and indeed an important part of the community as well as finding his kindness, polite manners and innocence bringing people together. All is not straightforward though and not everyone welcomes Paddington into their community, but the central theme throughout the film and indeed the books and musical is that we must all open our hearts to welcome the stranger.

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:34

Being welcoming to the foreigner is not just something that is nice to do. It is a fundamental part of our faith and commandments of God and the teachings of Jesus. History is full of people looking for scapegoats and the sword of judgement always falls on those who are different. It is no accident that when Jesus is asked by the lawyer, 'who is my neighbour?' He chooses a Samaritan to act as the hero. The lawyer was an expert in Jewish Law and would have hated the Samaritans. They were the most hated people at that time and that hatred ran for generations. The mere concept of a good Samaritan would seem impossible. But that's the point. Jesus asks for us to strip back our preconceived notions of who is good and who is bad and see all people as equal. It's telling that at the end of the story Jesus askes the Lawyer who acted like a neighbour he responded, 'The one who showed him mercy'. He couldn't even bring himself to name him.

When we're looking at the world Jesus asks us to look with compassion on those who are different, who are the outcasts, the foreigners and refugees. Whether that is people fleeing war, people risking life and safety on a boat or people struggling to fit into a society that sees them as the enemy and continually points out their differences. Being a refugee, asylum seeker or immigrant is not an easy decision to make. How can we expect them to integrate into society if we keep closing our doors and refuse to meet them where they are?

There will always be people traveling far and wide in search of safety and a place to call home. Let us open our hearts and our churches and make room for those in need. To paraphrase the label on Paddington's tag, 'Please look after your neighbours'.

Br James Woolford

Minister of Dukinfield and Royton Moravian Congregations

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