

Wellbeing Matters

Newsletter – November 2023

Message from Revd Lorraine Mellor: Chair of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District:



Friends and colleagues, Welcome to the very first Wellbeing Newsletter. According to the dictionary wellbeing is “a state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy”. As a church, as a district, why do we need to concern ourselves with wellbeing and what does it actually mean for each one of us?

I have a picture on my wall bought for me by friends who know me well which says “*Save water and drink Champagne*” I don’t drink tea at all and can’t remember my last cup, occasionally I will have a coffee and if it’s decaf, great. My drink of choice during my day is usually hot blackcurrant or a fruit tea. When I do drink alcohol it’s usually champagne and then it’s at weddings, Christmas and when I am at my sister’s in France. An occasional glass of champagne is a part of my well-being. Another part of my staying well is to keep up with family and friends who are scattered all over the county and abroad and so I make a point of zooming, face timing, texting and messaging and we meet whenever we can and I have no problems in taking two or three days off to meet up with family and friends because I know that I work my socks off at other times and 50 to 60 hour weeks are common place. This will be the same for many ministers I know, and I don’t feel guilty anymore, but it took me a long time to get to this place. I also know that these times feed me and make me better able to cope with the demands of my vocation. I also bake and it is rare for there to be no cake in our house, it’s for me a time of relaxation and although I often have baking failures, I haven’t poisoned anyone yet! I love watching films and good drama on TV and all of these things enable me to be the minister I am called to be, but as a cartoon character said “*different strokes for different folks*”

I know that for some ministers and lay employees the demands of ministry get them down and the ministry to which they are called sucks all the joy out of life, they doubt their calling and vocation, and this seriously affects their ability to do the job God called them to do. The demand on workers and their families in the church today be it lay or ordained, is far greater than when I entered ministry 30 years ago and we underestimate the impact that this is having on our well-being at our peril. I have seen too many ministers retire early due to ill health, too many retire early because they just can’t do it anymore and too many ministers go off on sabbatical too tired to enjoy the gift the church has given to them. And too many go off sick with mental health issues. There is a serious cost to this and can also apply to many of our lay people who don’t just have one job in church but many and as in the world of work today, it’s demanding.

Wellbeing has become a multi-million pound industry across the world and the church is very much behind the curve in supporting those with whom we work in the church. That is why I am enormously grateful the Cornwall and Isles for Scilly district decided at my suggestion to employ a part time wellbeing officer (Tracey) as I personally would employ one in every district across the Connexion. (There is only one other.) Tracey as the wellbeing officer is there to support ministers and lay employees to be the best they can be in flourishing and being mentally and physically well. Supporting and listening to those hurt by trauma. Supporting vocational discernment. Encouraging good practice around human flourishing and developing a District Wellbeing policy. We can’t do it all at once but watch this space!

We need faith to help each other to be well, to flourish and that means physically mentally and spiritually, why? - because we are worth it. Jesus went to a cross for each one of us because we are loved. Let us love and value each other and be kind. Those three things go a long way in enabling us all to flourish.

God bless

Lorraine

Hello!

I am Tracey Collins, and I am the new Wellbeing Officer for the District.



A little bit about me! I have previously worked for 13 years as the Circuit Administrator and latterly Circuit Manager in the Bodmin Padstow & Wadebridge (BPW) Circuit. Before I had my children I was a senior manager in the Civil Service. I am a keen volunteer and have volunteered for Cornwall Hospice for nearly 5 years. I was Chair of Trustees of a local Charity for 6 years and was Chair of the National Childbirth Trust Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend branch for 5 years when I lived in Wales. I am married to David a Vet and have twin daughters Amelia and Jasmine who have both recently graduated as Doctors.

The District Wellbeing Officer is a new post and it is really good news that the District has committed to investing in Wellbeing as part of its future strategy. I am passionate about wellbeing and I am really looking forward to working with you to promote wellbeing in the District as part of our future strategic mission.

As Christians the Bible provides us with the guidance and principles that promote physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. It offers us a holistic perspective on wellbeing.

Wellbeing improves behaviour by promoting emotional regulation, increases empathy and compassion, improves decision-making, enhances self-control, and strengthens social connections. When we experience positive wellbeing in our lives we are more likely to engage in positive behaviours, which contribute to our own personal growth and the wellbeing of people we encounter.

However, the Church is lagging behind in terms of promoting wellbeing and it is important that we understand why this is and how we can change it.

Historically, the church has primarily focused on matters of faith, spirituality, and salvation. While these are of course important aspects of wellbeing, there may have been less emphasis on the holistic personal wellbeing including our physical, mental, and emotional health.

Cultural and societal influences are factors that can impact our understanding of wellbeing, and the church is not exempt. The importance of overall wellbeing can sometimes be overshadowed by society's strong emphasis on productivity, material prosperity, and success. It is possible that the church has unintentionally embraced these cultural standards, which has resulted in a lack of focus on wellbeing.

It takes knowledge, experience, and resources to promote wellbeing and we need to put this infrastructure in place to successfully embed and encourage wellbeing. It's going to be important that as a District we place an emphasis on wellbeing.

The Church like any other organisation, exhibits resistance to change and it will take time for us to embrace and incorporate a wellbeing focus in the District, because change as we know is challenging.

It is though important to be positive! While the Church maybe lagging behind in terms of wellbeing there are plenty of our own Circuit churches who are doing amazing work actively supporting and prioritising community wellbeing and we hear about one of these later in the Newsletter.

We need to be as excited to do the same for our own wellbeing and that's what I will be working on with our Circuits in the New Year.

Being a diverse people we might have different approaches to wellbeing and it is a complicated subject so this will call for us to engage in constant conversation, knowledge, which includes training and most importantly a readiness for us to change and grow together. Please do sign up for the first of our District one to one training in January, which is Mental Health First Aid. Details are further on in the newsletter.

The next Newsletter will be in the New Year, please do send any stories or articles you want to share. Until then both Revd Loraine and I wish you all a blessed and peaceful Christmas.

Best wishes,

Tracey

PS: I would like to thank John Tilling who has so professionally set out the newsletter in word format. I worked with John on a similar project for the BPW Circuit which we started during the Covid lockdown.

Wellbeing: A Complex Concept

Wellbeing *noun* - 'wel-'bē-ij: the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous.

Wellbeing is a complex and evolving concept that reflects how you feel about yourself and your life.



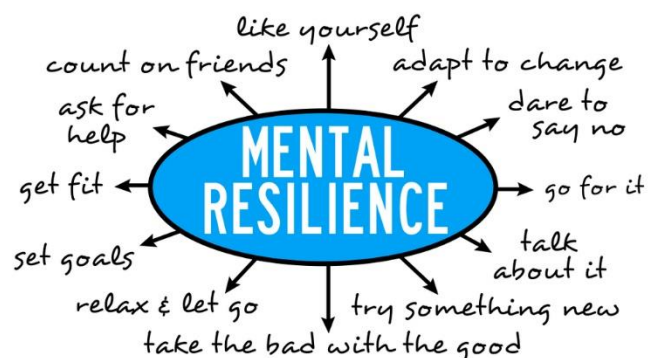
It involves your physical, mental, emotional and social health, as well as your satisfaction with life and sense of purpose.

Wellbeing can change over time and be influenced by many factors, such as your environment, relationships, activities, challenges and achievements.



Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness, but a state of being comfortable, happy and healthy.

Wellbeing can be enhanced by positive habits, such as self-care, mindfulness, gratitude, optimism, social support and learning; and is linked to happiness and life satisfaction, but also to resilience and coping skills that help you deal with stress and adversity.



Clergy Wellbeing: The Smoke Before the Burnout

In an article written for the Church Times Huw Spanner looked at the danger signs for clergy who are running on empty. Primarily directed at the Anglican Church the message relates equally as well to the Methodist presbytery.

The social psychologist Christina Maslach has described burnout as “an erosion of the soul caused by a deterioration of one’s values, dignity, spirit, and will”.

The chief executive of the Guild of Health and St Raphael, the Revd Dr Gillian Straine, lists its symptoms: “Emotional exhaustion, loss of empathy. You want to be alone. You fantasise that you’re somewhere else. You feel unwell, pessimistic, irritable, overwhelmed. You don’t care any more.”



The Revd Dr Gillian Straine

Burnout is common in the caring professions. But, she says, “there are certain things in the Church that make clergy more susceptible — and increase their suffering.” Often, clergy have to put on a mask, not admitting even to themselves how they are really feeling, Dr Straine suggests. “You have to put a good face on because you represent Jesus: you represent hope in the face of suffering. That kind of disconnect between what you’re saying and who you are can cause emotional exhaustion.”

One of the commonest causes of burnout is a workplace made toxic by criticism, gossip, suspicion, lack of support, or micro-management, Dr Straine says. The private and public lives of the clergy are “much more mixed up” than most other people’s.

When your livelihood, your social life, and your housing are all intertwined, she continues, “things can go wrong quite badly, quite quickly, if your teenage child has a breakdown, or your partner gets sick, or you don’t manage a holiday because you got Covid that week and you spend three weeks recovering, and somebody’s made a complaint about you in your absence.

“When your workforce is largely volunteers, and your own role is not well defined, you can be very open to people taking a pop, thinking that they can do your job better than you, even if they haven’t had the training, because it’s subtle and nuanced; it’s not an expertise or a set of skills like a solicitor or a doctor has.” The Church’s managerialism and bureaucracy are at risk of taking clergy away from what they believe God is calling them to do in the community.

“I spend much of my time in large gatherings of clergy,” she explains. “When I tell them that their pastoral visiting, their baptisms, weddings, and funerals, is a core ministry of the Church, which is changing the world person by person, I can feel the relief in the room, and sometimes the anger that it isn’t recognised as such.”

Poor theology is another factor, Dr Straine says. “At the more Protestant end of things, we may feel that we’re acceptable to God only if we work really hard. There is also a theology of martyrdom: the idea that, in following Jesus, we are supposed to sacrifice ourselves. You hear that time and time again in clergy meetings.

“You measure your success in ministry by how tired you are, or how many funerals you’ve taken. It’s like a badge of honour. If I talk to clergy about the merits of a four-day working week, they laugh.”

Men and women in ordained ministry can experience burnout for different reasons, Dr Straine believes. “There is still a huge prejudice against female clergy. They have to meet a higher standard than men, in how they look and how they perform. And then there is the pressure women put on themselves. For men, I think there are bigger taboos around mental health and honesty.”

It is not only older clergy who are vulnerable. She is critical of the training that ordinands receive. “We build these people up; we tell them: ‘This is your vocation, and here’s some theology,’ and then they hit the ground, and it’s nothing like they’ve been trained for. They’ve not learnt about budgeting or fund-raising; they’re often expected to lead complex organisations, and it quickly overwhelms them.”

What should clergy do to avoid, or recover from, burnout? Dr Straine offers a threefold prescription: “The first element is what every book says: sleep, eat well, and exercise. Both male and female clergy are more likely

to be overweight than their peers. Look after your physical and mental health, maintain a good work-life balance, have a hobby, work on your close personal relationships, seek meaning.

“The second is: spend time working out your theology of work. What’s your model of ministry? If it involves martyrdom, there are other theologies that take our well-being much more seriously. Jesus said: ‘I came that you might have life, and life in all its abundance.’ In a culture where you are your achievements, it can be a powerful witness to the world, that we are not working ourselves to death, because God wants us to flourish.

“Third, you are going to need courage to say: ‘I can’t do everything. I’m going to take some time off. I’m going to sit and read. I’m going to pray.’”

The Guild of Health and St Raphael has gathered an online community that, from now until Advent, is exploring burnout and how to avoid it, or recover from it. “It’s a journey, but people can join at any time, and it’s free,” Dr Straine says. “We begin with the idea that we all have the potential to find healing in our own lives in the name of Christ.”

The programme is called Burn like Stars. “In Philippians,” Dr Straine explains, “Paul says that we should shine like stars. The output of a star depends on what is happening deep inside it; so we are using that metaphor to say, ‘How do we, as clergy and Christians, burn like stars without burning out?’”

For access to the “Burn Like Stars” series, visit: gohealth.org.uk/burnlikestars or sheldonretreat.com

+++++

Caring for Mental Health in Helston

On Mental Health Day, on October 10th the Methodist Blog in The Methodist Church website shared the great initiatives started by Central Methodist Church in the South of Cornwall: Hard Pressed but not Crushed and Stitch in the Ditch.

Central Methodist Church in Helston, Cornwall, is a beautiful and striking building in the busy centre of the town. One of the largest churches of the Lizard and Mount's Bay Methodist Circuit, Central Methodist Church has become a lighthouse for many people in need, notably for those struggling with mental health.



Central Methodist Church has been a long-term ally in Cornwall's fight against poverty. Catering for physical needs such as meals, providing access to showers and clothing, the church decided to also provide mental health support.

Embedded in its community, Central Methodist Church reached out to local social prescribers and doctors. The initiative proved so successful that local GPs offer the support groups at Central Methodist Church to patients.

“I think all of us can be vulnerable sometimes. As a chapel we felt we needed to do something. As Christians we are not exempt from poor mental health, but we do have someone who walks alongside us,” explains Revd Danny Reed, superintendent of the Lizard and Mount's Bay Circuit.

Two initiatives are in place to help the community, the first one is **Hard Pressed but not Crushed**. A discussion and a supportive time over breakfast on Saturday mornings these are informal and confidential conversations. “One day, we might talk about the medications we use and their side effects. Other times, we might talk about how walking along the coastal path and being with nature helps,” adds Danny. “We are a listening service for anyone who needs a chat and we signpost to further help.”

The second one is **Stitch in the Ditch** – a sewing term used when one is doing patchwork – a women-only group offering time to discuss what’s on their mind while crafting with recycled materials. Meeting every Tuesday, the group offers mental health support, some are lonely and all are eager to chat and engage.

“There are people from all walks of life in the group. The help we are providing is recognised by the NHS and we have direct referrals from our local hospital,” adds Sarah Reed, Mission Enabler, Epworth Centre Missioner and Community Worker.

An extension to Stitch in the Ditch is **Care for the Carers**. Some people who were interested in coming to the group could not attend because of their work as carers. Central Methodist Church decided to ensure that the carers were given the time to have fun and relax once a month. This event is supported by about 25 people, including healthcare professionals.

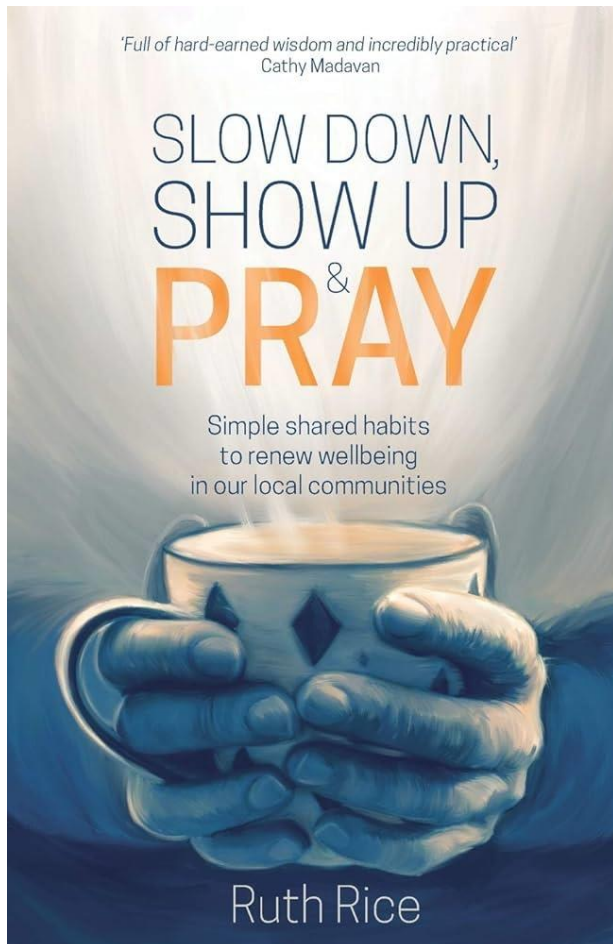
Health & Wellbeing Prayers in Helston

On 16th October I was delighted to attend a United Prayer Event at Helston led by Revd Andrew Hill a Supernumerary Minister. The theme was *Health and Wellbeing* so I was really looking forward to praying about my favourite subject!

I haven't been to such a well organised and focussed prayer meeting for a long time and I was really moved by the prayers said and the fellowship we all enjoyed.

Andrew very kindly gave me two gifts when I arrived, some beautiful cards of Degibna Prayer Chapel of which Andrew is a Trustee: <https://www.degibnaprayerchapel.org.uk/>.

Andrew also gave me a book by Anne Rice, entitled *Slow down, Show up and Pray*.



In the book Ruth Rice provides useful tools to preserve our own mental health and assist people around us, as well as giving an account of the Renew Wellbeing charity she founded. In what ways might we revitalise our personal and communal wellbeing? Taking care of our mental health is more crucial than ever. Many of us are looking for easy, doable strategies to improve our wellbeing in our day-to-day lives.

Ruth founded the Renew Wellbeing charity to assist churches in creating safe spaces where people can receive assistance with their mental and emotional wellbeing, following her own mental health crises. This book is jam-packed with inspirational tales, thought-provoking materials, and useful advice to inspire individuals and Churches.

This is a gem of a book in that it is simple to read and is packed with helpful guidance on contemplative prayer for wellbeing. The book describes how Renew Wellness Clinics were established. Before the lockdown, they had grown from one Renew space in Nottingham to over fifty. Training continued during the Lockdown and now there are over 100 churches who are trained to open their own Renew spaces where it is acceptable to not feel okay. It's a really thought provoking book and if you can, read it. This book may will change how you think of wellbeing and how this can be a force for good for both you and your local

community.

Here below is the Prayer Session we followed:

Welcome / Psalm 103 v1-5 / Opening Prayer
Introduction / Reflection: 'You are in this place' (CD track)
Prayer in Small Groups for NHS etc.
Philippians 4 v4-8
Introduce Tracey Collins - District Wellbeing Officer
Mention Renew Wellbeing charity & book 'Slow Down, Show Up & Pray'
Pray in Small Groups for Wellbeing & Mental Health
Revelation 22 v1-2
Prayer for Ukraine, Israel & Palestine
Reflection (Instrumental CD track)
Prayer All Together for the Healing of the Nations
Blessing

Tracey

Wellbeing Training

Last but by no means least here is a reminder that each of you is strongly urged to sign up for the important face-to-face training that has been arranged for you in the District comprising the following courses in January, April, and July 2024:

- Mental Health First Aid Training
- Responding to Bullying and Harassing Behaviour
- Growing through Change and Conflict.

All the courses are to be held at Tresillian Methodist Church and will be led by Sharon Rowe from the Learning Network. Please make room in your busy schedules and do your best to attend these courses. Booking details have already been circulated by email but here is a reminder of the links which you can click through from this newsletter.

Training Links

Mental Health First Aid - Tuesday 16th and Wednesday 17th January 2024, 9am until 5pm both days, at Tresillian Methodist Church, 4 Fairfax Road, Tresillian, TR2 4AZ.

For more information and to book: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/adult-mental-health-first-aid-tickets-753091666447?aff=oddtcreator&_gl=1%2A15b920v%2A_up%2AMQ..%2A_ga%2AMTYwMDI1MTk1Ni4xNjk5NjMyNTQ2%2A_ga_TQVES5V6SH%2AMTY5OTYzMjU0NS4xLjAuMTY5OTYzMjU0NS4wLjAuMA..

Responding to Bullying and Harassing Behaviour - Tuesday 30th April 2024, 9:30am - 4pm, at Tresillian Methodist Church, 4 Fairfax Road, Tresillian, TR2 4AZ.

For more information and to book: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/responding-to-bullying-and-harassing-behaviour-registration-753094976347?aff=oddtcreator&_gl=1%2Aadar3ut%2A_up%2AMQ..%2A_ga%2AMTY4NDMyMDU2OS4xNjk5NjMyOTYy%2A_ga_TQVES5V6SH%2AMTY5OTYzMjk2MC4xLjAuMTY5OTYzMjk2MC4wLjAuMA..

Growing through Change and Conflict – Tuesday 9th July 2024, 9:30am - 4pm, at Tresillian Methodist Church, 4 Fairfax Road, Tresillian, TR2 4AZ.

For more information and to book: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/growing-through-change-and-conflict-registration-753093822897?aff=oddtcreator&_gl=1%2A11bj36m%2A_up%2AMQ..%2A_ga%2AODEwNTg2NDUzLjE2OTk2MzMwNzQ.%2A_ga_TQVES5V6SH%2AMTY5OTYzMzA3Mi4xLjAuMTY5OTYzMzA3Mi4wLjAuMA..

Tracey Collins

Wellbeing Officer

wellbeing@cornwallmethodists.org.uk

07733 015366

Registered charity number: 1133238