No sooner had my local supermarket cleared away its stock of Halloween costumes and pumpkins than it began to decorate the store with tinsel, Santa’s, reindeer and Christmas foodstuffs in fancy tins and boxes all with inflated prices. Then along comes the annual John Lewis Christmas tearjerker video ad on TV. Ahhh! Cute child, fluffy penguins and constant exposure AAGH!!

Now don’t get me wrong I think it is very tasteful - no sex or violence, no bad language just a soundtrack of a wonderful Lennon & McCartney song that went missing for years and now making even more money for John’s estate and for Macca. The song is entitled “Real Love” and I wonder quite whether the advertising agency and the people commissioning the video realise the irony of that.

In my spare time!!! I am a member of DADS (Downham Amateur Dramatic Society), just right for a show off you might say. We are currently in rehearsal for the pantomime “Cinderella” and I will be playing the part of the Queen, ie. Prince Charming’s mother. She is so anxious to get her son married off that as far as she is concerned love doesn’t figure in her thinking at all - leaving me to give a dreadful rendition of the Tina Turner song “What's love got to do with it?”

I guess you can see where I am going with this.

Love has everything to do with it! Real love, God’s love is the only answer to the troubles of the world. It is that which brings hope when we despair as we watch the news. It is that which makes me say when I hear the song “I wish it could be Christmas every day” Well it can!

It is that real love that we read about in the good news. It is that real love that we profess. In John’s wonderful gospel, when Christ wanted his slightly slow on the uptake friends to understand the meaning of the word ‘love’, he got a bowl of water, rolled up his sleeves and washed their mucky feet. Not slick and sentimental, raucous and cynical, but crude and effective. They never again needed to ask what love meant or what their calling was.

I pray that you, your nearest and dearest, and the world may experience the real love of God this Christmas time and beyond. Because God knows we need it.

Janet,
Sing songs of hope in the waiting air
and begin the dance of joy,
for the life of faith is before us.
Look into the distance and see the rising dawn
with shining rays in acts of love
and warming brightness from the heart of God.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon.

We bring to God the MDO Community to which we belong, those members who ask and need our prayers, that we might each find peace, healing and comfort according to our need; know something of God’s love and care for us and together grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection.

Watch, Wait, Hope

We pray for our sisters and brothers who are hurting, physically or emotionally and with those who weep or worry for loved ones - may the friendship of Christ and our prayers, hold them in their pain and touching them with love.

- Marian Sharp - continuing a slow recovery from a major stroke.
- Sylvie and Jim Phillips as Jim continues to receive treatment for a brain tumour. Jim has now been admitted to St Catherin’s Hospice in Preston.
- Sue Hibberd who remains in deep distress (We continue to be in contact with Sue who continues to ask that you make contact via the Centre only, if you wish to write to Sue, please do so via Deacon Janet Stafford during Karen’s sabbatical. We realise that this is difficult for some members of the Order to hear when their desire is to reach out and support Sue but we hope you understand)
- Sue Robert’s continuing to wait for treatment for her heart.
- Michelle and Dave Legumi as they support Dave’s sister Carla and her husband Peter; following Peter, aged 53, being diagnosed with incurable cancer.
- Flip and Angela Den Uil, ask for prayer for her brother Richard with a rapid, terminal cancer; in particular for Richard’s children whose mother died only a year again from the same disease.
- For Tracey Hume’s mother having undergone “last chance” surgery for a debilitating back condition.
- For members whose family and friends live in areas affected by the Ebola disease
- For Paddy Sanders still struggling with the after effects of shingles.
- For Chris Greening and her family as they support her through the difficult journey ahead.
- For Margaret Cox and her family as her health fails to improve.
- For Sylvia Kempson awaiting spinal surgery and for her husband Stephen whose heart condition has caused problems.
- For Jane Paine’s father who has had a severe heart attack
- For Ellie & Luke Griffith supporting their children.. In particular Zac following his recent diagnosis of CF Liver disease and Tess as she copes with her respiratory infection.
- For Angleena Keizer who remains in hospital with pancreatitis and complications caused by this condition
• For **Kathleen Jones**, currently in Ward 4 of Furness hospital, and the decisions being made about her future

And for those who prefer not to be named but who also desire peace and well-being.

**Lord in your mercy - hear our prayer.**

We hold with prayer the families and friends of those in our Order and wider family who have gone to glory recently:

• For the family of **Sister Dorothy Tolson** who went to be with her Lord on the 5th December aged 104. We remember that Dorothy was a former Vice President of the Wesley Order of Deaconesses and we give thanks for her witness and ministry. Dorothy’s funeral will be held at Glyn Valley Crematorium in 18th Dec @ 2.30pm The Order will be represented by Mark Attwood.

• For **Margaret Davies** on the death of her sister Jean.

  **Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer**

We hold with prayer those who are uncertain or anxious about the next step on their journey - may the Light of Christ illuminate their steps.

• For our new probationers in the early days of their first appointment.
• For all in this year's stationing process, both deacons, and presbyters; students going into appointments for the first time and for the circuits seeking the ministry of a deacon.
• For those presbyters who have yet to be matched into appointments
• **Sheila Dawson** returning to work after major surgery.

**Lord in your mercy-hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are called to make major changes in their living out of their calling - may the Way of Christ be revealed in their journeying.

• Those who have recently sat down, adapting to a new rhythm of living.
• For all who are settling into new appointments and homes.
• For those disappointed by the re-invitation or stationing process and who find themselves in an unexpected place
• For those who hold ‘without appointment’ status but nevertheless, remain firmly within our community.
• For **Mark Attwood, Fiona de Boltz, Phil Osborne & Ruth Yorke** and their respective families who are still waiting to be matched into appointments
• For those involved in the formal processes of the Church.

**Lord in your mercy-hear our prayer.**

We celebrate with members who have special birthdays and anniversaries in recent and coming weeks.
- Rita Jakeman and Cedric May both of whom have birthdays that are nice round numbers with a nought and who will no longer require a dispensation not to come to convocation.

Gracious God, help each of us in our daily place, remembering that the common place is holy ground. May the generosity and humour of God flow through our frailty. May the hand of God hold us in our trembling. May we live within the shalom and justice of God.

Watch, Wait, Hope,

News from the Centre:

Relocation news – there is both good and less good news about the MDO’s relocation process. Whilst the actual relocation went ahead and all our goods an chattels are now safely at Church House, we are still waiting for news about our final resting place as it were. There is to be some reorganisation and building work at Church House and until that is complete, we shall remain in our temporary space on the 2nd Floor. However, we have unpacked some of our things and anyone dropping in to see us will find enough around to reassure them that it is definitely the Order’s space however temporary that might be. Unfortunately, Sue’s manse move has been delayed again due to circumstances beyond anyone’s control. This is now likely to happen late February/early March and Sue continues to commute from Birmingham as and when necessary (and possible!). We are grateful for administrative support from Louise Taylor at Church House. Louise heads up the admin team at MCH and she is getting to grips with our administrative needs so things are looking brighter in the MDO admin department! Please continue to hold all involved in making decisions about our home in Church House within your prayerful considerations and that we may find our resting place.

MDO Prayer Handbook – you should all by now have received a copy of this years Prayer Handbook. We are aware that one or two have gone astray so if anyone has not, please drop a line to office@mdo.org.uk and a copy will be sent to you. We are aware of one or two printing errors and apologise for that - we shall try harder next year to get it right next year and to that end, it will be likely that you will be asked to complete an online prayer request. More news at a later date. In the meantime, if anyone has noticed something that is not correct, please do let us know at the Centre.

Convocation – just a gentle reminder that the dates of Convocation are 5th – 8th May 2015. Preparations are well under way and shall be moving onto an on-line booking system, which will cut out a lot of administration. Details will be available in the Spring about how to book. We appreciate that there are those within the Order who do not
have internet access and are hoping that Area Group Secretaries will be willing to book places on their behalf.

**DCPOC** - DCPOC has agreed a new model of pastoral care for our probationers and students following changes in the oversight of probationers and change in role of within the leadership of the Order. Each new probationer going into circuit for the first time in September 2014 has now been matched with a Wise Senior, an ordained member of the Order who has agreed to fully fulfill this role and meets the criteria set out by DCPOC. Our students deacons will receive regular pastoral support, mainly through phone calls (once or twice a term) from two ‘Wise Seniors’, Lynne Sylvester-Tonge and Janet Stafford. Lynne and Janet have already been offering pastoral and prayer support to our students through their chaplaincy and Pastoral secretary roles at the MDO Student Conference. The ‘Wise Senior’ is not to take away from the care and support offered by Area Groups, individual members, the training institution but rather to complement it and the expectation is that Area Groups should try whenever possible to include students in their meetings, changing usual meeting times occasionally to enable this to happen.

**Role of ROAC with new probationers** - from September 2014, new probationers will be required to meet with a small panel of ROAC (the Religious Order Advisory committee) to explore their developing understanding and formation as members of a religious order and all that this entails in terms of our discipline and living by a rule of life. The date for this year is Monday 19th January and will take place at the MDO Centre @ MCH London. **Would all members of the ROAC and all probationers going into circuit for the first time in September 2014** make sure that they have this date in their diary. To be clear, this affects the following probationers:

- Angie Allport
- Mel Beaven
- Tim Coleman
- Laura Evans
- Jon Everingham
- Linda Gilson
- Maria Howard
- Lemia Nkwelah
- Maggie Patchett
- Leanne Kensett (WA)
- Pam Luxton
- Ramona Samuel
- Julie Morton
- Peter Reast
- Susie Viana

Appointments available are 10 – 11am; 11.15 – 12.15pm; 1 – 2pm; 2.15- 3.15pm; 3.30-4.30pm. If you have a preference, please let the Centre know on office@mdo.org.uk asap and we shall try our best to accommodate that.

For year two probationers, the same pattern as last year is being adopted.

For year three probationers, please follow the guidance given to you individually by DCPOC.

**Full details (for information and your prayers) of both these changes for probationers can be found on the Methodist Church website under the “Handbook for ministerial probation” and the ‘MDO Supplementary handbook for probation’.

**Stationing News** – members of the Order are already aware that there are insufficient appointments for all those deacons available for stationing this year and the changes that have had to be made to the agreed protocols for this year as a result. Projections for future stationing needs for the connexional Stationing Committee have been done and it is likely that this pattern will repeat for the next few years. Whilst it is clear that the overall numbers of ministers available for stationing are similar to the overall number of
appointments available, there is a marked difference between availability of appointments within the two orders of ministry. The number of presbyters being sought is greater than the numbers of presbyters available and conversely, the number of deacons being sought is fewer than those available. As a Church we are the difficult position whereby we are responding positively to individuals seeking to test out the call of God upon their lives by offering for ordained diaconal ministry, yet, the circuits within our connexion are not calling for deacons to serve within them. Whilst this is a much bigger conversation than can be had within the pages of the Order Paper, this does have a serious impact on the stationing process.

It would perhaps be helpful for all members of the Order to have some information on this years stationing process for the sake of transparency and also in order that those in stationing may be supported by the whole Order.

Firstly, those in stationing were prioritised in terms of their personal circumstances and needs so that first priority was given to those with very pressing and particular special needs. Two deacons were identified in this category. The second priority were probationers which is in accordance with the protocols set by the connexional Stationing Committee and therefore outside the control of the Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee. The third priority were ordained deacons.

The current situation is that there were 6 probationers and 13 ordained deacons available for stationing, making a totally of 19 overall. There were 15 appointments available of which, two were part time and one was suitable for a job-share. Both special cases, all probationers and 9 ordained deacons were matched into appointments which leaves 4 ordained deacons remaining unmatched.

Those who remain unmatched are:
Mark Attwood
Fiona de Boltz
Phil Osborne
Ruth Yorke

Please pray for Mark, Fiona, Phil and Ruth as appointment’s are sought for them. Those matched are visiting their appointments currently, with the exception of probationers who will be informed of their appointments early January with visits taking place shortly afterwards.

If anyone would like further information or who would wish to make representation in regard to the wider issues surrounding the stationing process please drop Sue a line. This is a difficult issue and will clearly need a radically new approach to deal with the whole range of issues that surround it. Sue would like to hear from any members of the Order (supernumeraries, active or student) who might have a view on it that might help us into a different place. Area Groups meeting in January might wish to have a conversation about this and drop Sue a line afterwards.

Sabbatical news
Karen will be returning from her sabbatical on the 5th January 2015. Janet Stafford will remain as acting Pastoral Secretary during the month of January, particularly as the MDO Leadership Group meets to consider the new role descriptions for the Warden and Deputy Warden.
Christmas Closing - The Centre will be closed between the 19th December and the 5th January 2015. If you need to contact either Sue or Janet, please use our respective manse telephone numbers or email us.

News from the Order:

Malcolm Knowles would like to thank everyone for their support and care following the recent death of his father.

David Clark has recently published a new book called ‘The Kingdom at Work Project – A communal approach to mission in the workplace’. David is kindly offering copies of his book to members of the Order at the reduced rate of £10 plus £2.80 p&p. Anyone wishing to purchase a copy or would like to talk further about David’s work on workplace chaplaincy, please contact David directly.

Dates for your diary and your prayers:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>5th Jan</td>
<td>Karen returns from sabbatical</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th Jan</td>
<td>Connexional Leadership Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>13th Jan</td>
<td>Stationing Matching Group 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th Jan</td>
<td>Y 1 probationers meet with the Religious Order Advisory Committee @ MCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>26th Jan</td>
<td>MDO Leadership group meet to begin the process of drawing up new role descriptions for the Warden &amp; Deputy Warden</td>
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<td>28th Jan</td>
<td>Ministries Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Feb</td>
<td>first meeting of the Stationing Action Group to match as yet, unmatched ministers</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th Feb</td>
<td>MDO Leadership Group meeting</td>
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May the Angel of Awakening stir your heart come alive to the eternal within you,
To all the invitations that quietly surround you this Advent