

# Church for beginners

CAN you imagine it? I am going to a church service for the very first time. What am I going to wear? Will it be necessary to put on a suit and tie or can I go in jeans and a sweat shirt? Will there be a welcome for me as I arrive or can I sneak in unnoticed? Will I be shown where to sit or can I sit anywhere? I have been given a lot of books and pieces of paper which is all a bit confusing because I don't know which to use.

Everybody seems to know each other, there is such a lot of chatter, but nobody is saying anything to me. I seem to be sitting all by myself.

A lady at the front is welcoming everybody and the minister but who is she? Somebody needs to introduce her! The service starts



## Voicing a View

by MALCOLM ROTHWELL

and I guess I'd better stand up because everybody else does. We sing a strange hymn written 200 years ago. There are some unusual words and I find it difficult to understand. I wonder why everybody is singing such an old hymn. Their hearts don't seem to be in it, though.

I get the impression they are singing out of duty rather than a sense of passion or enthusiasm. Anyway, I would like to sing something which makes sense today.

There was a prayer which was read through very quickly. I didn't have time to take in what was being said. Should I have had my eyes shut or knelt down? I have no idea. Then there was a reading from the Old Testament. It just didn't make sense.

I have never heard of Ezekiel. It would have helped me to have some words of explanation to put the verses into context. The major embarrassment was when someone came round obviously expecting some money from me. These days I don't carry money, since I pay everything by my piece of plas-

tic or by cheque but there was no facility for that or, indeed, for making a gift-aided contribution. I wonder what would be a reasonable gift? Before deciding I would like to know what the money is used for.

The sermon (is that what it's called?) seemed to go on forever. Again, every word was read so it all became a bit boring looking at the top of the preacher's head and most of it went right over the top of my head.

### Experience

There was nothing to look at, it was just a lot of words. I wondered what the preacher's experience was, because none of it seemed to relate to the world I live in.

Toward the end there was another load of words from another book. This seemed to go on for a very long time, but then people started eating a tiny piece of bread and a sip of something red. I wondered whether it was OK for me to join in. It seemed a strange ritual to me. What was going on? Was it a celebration? A memorial? A frugal meal?

Then somebody came round expecting some more money! What could this money possibly be for? Did I have to pay for that tiny meal? Eventually, the service came to an end. What a relief! I drifted out without anybody saying a word to me. I can't say it had done much for me at all. The overwhelming impression was that I had been

to something that belonged to a different era; a bit like going to a silent film. Things have, literally, moved on a long way since then. There was very little relevance to my situation but, more particularly, I didn't understand much of what was going on.

Perhaps things would get better if I took the plunge and joined the club. The trouble is it seems a very big plunge for me to take.

I think it might help if they had a church for beginners, or, at the very least, somebody came round and we had a chat about it. Please don't send the minister: I want to see an ordinary person like me!

**The Rev Malcolm Rothwell is chair of the Methodist Retreat and Spirituality Network.**



## Questions & Answers

SEND your questions and answers to Questions & Answers, *Methodist Recorder*, 122 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0TL (email: [editorial@methodistrecorder.co.uk](mailto:editorial@methodistrecorder.co.uk))

SHOULD yoga ever be practised on Methodist premises? (*Recorder*, September 2.)

**NO!** Yoga is rooted in Hinduism and has links with Buddhism, not Christianity. Our Methodist churches are consecrated Christian places where God is worshipped and adored, where Jesus Christ is glorified and where the Holy Spirit is free to move as he will.

They have at one time been dedicated for "the worship and service of God in their community" and at the time of the dedication it was prayed that "all who enter here may find it to be none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Methodist Worship Book p 511).

As I see it, the main problem with yoga is that it encourages the emptying of one's mind – something which could be dangerous (Matthew 12. 43-45, Luke 11. 24-26). If our church congregations want exercise and meditation groups, then there should be Christian resources available. Instead of emptying our minds, perhaps we should, as Christians, be filling them with true, pure and lovely thoughts (Philippians 4. 8).

I am sure that most yoga groups are quite innocent and their leaders are ordinary people, but we must be on our guard. Are we sure that these same yoga groups and their subsequent leaders will be so innocent in say, 10 years' time? We must not forget the warning about wolves in sheep's clothing (1 Peter 5. 8-9a). Jesus issued a strong warning to anyone who caused "one of these little ones" to sin (Mark 9.42).

Letting our premises to a yoga group sets a precedent from which it could be difficult for a church to extricate itself.

Yoga has rapidly become part of the "pick and mix" of the New Age movement and so if we let our premises to yoga groups, why not to Tai Chi classes and Reiki therapists?

Why not sell crystals, dream-catchers and incense sticks? Why not allow pyramids to be erected, permit Indian head massage and, to take the argument to its most ridiculous extreme, let our premises to groups of witches? Just where is the line to be drawn?

Our premises have been entrusted to us as sacred places where we serve God and serve our community and we should be praying for wisdom when we decide to whom we let them. I firmly believe it would be most unwise to let to yoga groups. – *Diane Thompson, Colchester.*

# Subscribe to the *Methodist Recorder*



You can save well over 10 per cent of the cost of the newspaper each week by taking out a UK subscription to receive the **Methodist Recorder** through the post.

Take out a subscription and have your **Methodist Recorder** come

to you in the comfort of your own home. New subscribers can choose between two free gifts:

- A) A copy of "Gospel Insights" by the Rev Dr Brian Beck or
- B) A special mystery book.

**Don't delay – reply today!**

Please contact me to arrange for me to receive the **Methodist Recorder** by post and receive (tick box)  
 A) "Gospel Insights" by the Rev Dr Brian Beck   
 or  
 B) A special mystery book

Name .....  
 Address .....  
 Telephone (essential) .....  
 Email .....

NB: **DO NOT SEND A CHEQUE.** Subscriptions are renewed annually each July 1 so subscriptions taken out for other than a full year pay pro rata to the end of the subscription year. Please supply a contact telephone number and give your credit card details and we will start your subscription from the first available slot.

**Methodist Recorder**, 122 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0TL  
 Email: [subscriptions@methodistrecorder.co.uk](mailto:subscriptions@methodistrecorder.co.uk)  
 Telephone: 020 7251 8414 ext 226

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK: £84.80  
 REST OF EUROPE: £124.55  
 REST OF THE WORLD: £148.40  
 Single copies: £3.00 each including p&p to UK addresses; £5.00 to rest of Europe; £5.00 to rest of the world.

**NB DO NOT SEND A CHEQUE.** Fill in your contact details (left) so we can telephone you, agree the date for your subscription to start and notify you of the appropriate amount due. Give your credit/debit card details below. (We do not accept American Express or Diners Club cards.)  
 Please charge my card number:

Valid-from date ..... Expiry date .....

Issue number (if applicable) .....

First line of card address with number in address .....

Card address postcode .....

Last 3 digits on signature strip on card reverse .....

Signature .....