



SUMMER 2017

ROOF 'N' ROOTS

The Newsletter of the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

A STRATEGY TO SERVE

MMHS BOARD CHAIR DEBBIE FAULKNER REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY INTO A LIFE OF SERVICE – AND HOW THAT INSPIRES HER WITH THE SOCIETY'S NEW STRATEGY

Debbie Bullock's career quest took her from cooking to caring. She planned to be a chef, but joined the civil service. Swapping kitchen worktop for DHSS counter, she found herself working with benefit claimants who were at their wits' end, suicidal or issuing threats to staff.

It was an eye-opener for young Debbie. She'd left school with ambitions of serving food – but ended up serving girocheques for much of the 80s. She helped change all that, too, because it was her idea for the DHSS to

use benefit books instead. That time showed her life on the edge. 'It was really awful,' she recalled, 'and things haven't changed in society. You hear similar stories now, 30 years on.'

A family background of conscience and compassion had clearly compelled Debbie towards this life of service – though she may not have realised it at the time. Her dad Tony was a Methodist minister, who – in his own words – 'served the servant of God' in Barnstaple, Bromsgrove, Chesham and Amersham, Aldershot, Farnborough and Camberley, Petersfield and Winchester Circuits – the last two as superintendent. The family had moved with his job.

Debbie's journey took her to nice places, too – like meeting husband-to-be Cliff Faulkner at the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs. The couple married at Sandhurst in 1981. They have a daughter, Lizzy, who suffers from Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a rare tissue disorder.

It was when Debbie was working at the Fire Service College – from 1988 to 2012 – that others also spotted where her life

journey was heading. Debbie had been managing stock in the college stores, which offered everything from fake blood to fire-fighting equipment. However, restructuring meant she found yet another career track in the area of human resources.

'I moved from counting toilet rolls to



Fire star – Debbie was honoured with the MBE for her work with the fire service



Photos: Jeff Tard

Debbie Faulkner with husband Cliff

BEFORE THE FLOOD

Stop in the name of love! For if you cherish your home – and your personal safety – you need to know how to turn off your water or gas supply in an emergency.

Water tap

Researchers have found a quarter of people have no idea where the water stopcock is in their property, risking damage from a leak. According to a recent survey from insurers Direct Line, almost seven million people don't know what a stopcock is.

A stopcock is your mains water tap.

It could be under the kitchen sink, in the airing cupboard, cellar or under floorboards by the front door.

Gas valve

Under the kitchen sink is where you may also find your gas isolation valve, the lever that turns off the gas supply. It might also be found under the stairs or in the garage. In newer houses, the gas meter and valve are often outside in a meter box.

Verify when your annual gas safety check is due. You should have a copy of your latest gas safety certificate. The next check will be due 12 months later, on or before the certificate date.



Photo: Chris Gander

Safety check – find out the location of your gas valve

'If anyone doesn't have their certificate, they can contact the Housing Society,' said Property Services Administrator Conrad Mercer-Graham. 'If you're going to be away at the time of your safety check, let us know so we can bring the appointment forward.' Phone Conrad on 020 7467 5270.

A MESSAGE FROM MAIRI



Debbie, our Chair, has spoken of our new strategy which will cover the period September 2017 to August 2022. It's very exciting! I'd like to share details of the 'glue' that will bind it together – our *vision, mission* and *core values*.

For our *vision*, we're using Acts 4:34 – 'There was not a single person in need among them'. What a challenge! But it's one that we want. You'll be relieved to know we'll keep doing what we do best – but our *mission* is being extended to offering wellbeing support, especially in the areas of mobility and independence. There's a lot that we do already, of course, but we want to do more. Finally, our *core values* will underscore everything – we're professional, caring and have a Christian distinctiveness.

A summary of our strategy will be published on our website soon – www.mmhs.org.uk

Wishing you lots of summer blessings,

• **Mairi Johnstone** CEO

There's never a dull moment in the MMHS office, as we deal with the myriad matters that demand our daily attention. Running MMHS is quite a complex business and ministry. Much planning goes into making this society the best it can be, working within our limited resources.

In addition to looking after operations, over the last year or so we've spent a lot of time looking to the future and thinking strategically. No organisation worth its salt can 'stand still' – and we want to be agile and fully responsive to the changing needs of the Church and society. Dare I say it – we would like to lead the way.

A STRATEGY TO SERVE

counting people,' she joked. 'I had a lovely boss who found it quite difficult to understand why my whole existence was about helping others,' she recalled. Her boss put her name forward for an MBE for her work with the fire service, the community and charity. That meant a day out at Buckingham Palace for Debbie, where she received the award from Prince Charles.

When Debbie's father retired prematurely, he and wife Shirley became Society residents. Tony has since died, but Debbie's mother still lives in the same house. 'The reason I applied for a role on the MMHS board initially all those nine years ago was to give something back,' said Debbie.

After serving as the Society's Vice Chair, she was elected Chair in February. Debbie finds herself at another landmark moment as the Society launches its new strategy for the future.

'I moved from counting toilet rolls to counting people'



Good point – amid all the busyness, Debbie finds a few moments to boost her knitting skills, but even then she's probably making things for others!

'I'm excited as we move into new areas of exploration,' said Debbie.

She's particularly interested in the use of assistive technology to help retired people follow independent lifestyles. 'I'm excited for the direction we're beginning to take in a wider sense,' Debbie added. 'We've had quite a narrow direction for the first 70 years of our existence. Now we're looking at the future of the Society.'

CROSSING THE LINE



Divine voice – Pat Billsborrow with husband Bob

REVD PAT BILLSBORROW HEARD THE DIVINE CALL AS A LITTLE GIRL. SINCE THEN, SHE'S LED CHURCHES, ENGAGED WITH COMMUNITIES AND WORKED WITH MMHS...

Pat Billsborrow was just eight when she heard the divine voice say, 'I want you'. She was standing in Durham Cathedral, by the black line where medieval women could not cross. No one else was there.

Growing up, she failed her O Levels. 'That's alright,' her dad told her, 'you can get married.' But an education official believed in her, and encouraged her to study through Open University.

In 1979, Pat found herself in religious broadcasting. She produced programmes for Radio Tees on big issues – from conscientious objectors in World War I to persecuted Christians behind the Iron Curtain.

On one of these weighty radio assignments, a Methodist minister challenged Pat with the question, 'What are you doing about your call to preach?' The young journalist wondered, 'What call to preach is that?'

Her inner eight-year-old child must've woken up. Pat was accepted into the Methodist ministry and went to college in 1984. At the same time, husband Bob was made redundant from his job and he went into teaching.

'The people were quite downhearted – but they welcomed us'

Pat came out of college and had a baptism of fire. She started her ministry in South Tyneside, as the community was suffering the bitter aftermath of the miners' strike. There were foodbanks and soup kitchens, just like today. 'It was a time of severe depression,' Pat recalled. 'The people were quite downhearted at the time. But they welcomed us.'

Pat was invited in 1994 to lead the ecumenical Church of Reconciliation in Scunthorpe. All-age worship, out-of-school club and parenting classes were



TARGET THE ROGUE TRADERS

Major alerts about rogue traders have been sounded by Trading Standards and AgeUK – among others. MMHS wants to make sure residents are equipped to face this problem.

A rogue trader is someone who tries to sell unnecessary products or services, or provides a service of a poor standard. Not everyone who comes to your front door is out to trick you. But London-based People First say it's important to be aware that some people do – and they prey on those who might be vulnerable.

These people will usually offer to carry out repairs or building works on your home and garden. Many will overcharge, provide a poor standard of work, and usually fail to give notice of cancellation rights.

There are nightmare stories of stressed-out householders left with a bill for hundreds of pounds for a leaky tap. Cambridgeshire police reported recently of a group that charged one victim £2,000 for a £400 job.

'The calls we tend to come across are cold door knocking from workers combing the locality when they're doing roofing, glazing and driveway projects,' said Property Services

Administrator Conrad Mercer-Graham.

'If the work is needed and the quote reasonable, we'd always check their credentials.' That includes whether they're genuinely accredited by trade bodies such as Gas Safe and FENSA, and are properly commercially insured.

The key guidance is – never buy or agree to buy anything at the door, and don't let a person into your home unless you're sure they represent a legitimate trader approved by MMHS. Always ask for proof of identity.

MMHS residents who remain concerned can phone the Society for further advice and support.

among the services offered to an estate of 7,500 residents.

In 1998 the couple moved to Birkenhead for a 'priority appointment'. As well as leading churches, Pat started working with the Wirral Methodist Housing Association – valuable experience for when she later joined the MMHS board.

'There are fewer ministers requiring housing in the same way'

On Pat's retirement ten years ago, the Billsborrows moved into an MMHS property in Cheshire. They have four children, 12 grandchildren and six great grandchildren. 'Being able to help the community in its greatest need is important,' she said. That's exactly what the Society is doing for ministers in need.'

She became chair of the MMHS board in 2012. Colleagues said they were 'immensely grateful to Pat for steering the Society through some difficult days'.

Now she's 80, what does Pat see for the Society's future? 'There are fewer ministers and fewer ministers who are requiring housing in the same way,' she said.

'People are becoming much more choosy about where they will live, rather than being grateful for the opportunity to be housed.'

What does she see looking back on her younger self who heard the heavenly whisper and crossed the line into ministry? 'I can see the journey,' said Pat, 'the journey of life, where you don't see the whole picture until you come to the end of it.'



Check the traders – not everyone who comes to your front door is out to trick you

HOME TRUTHS

REFLECTION BY REVD HEATHER WALKER

One of my favourite Bible stories – the Road to Emmaus – begins on a walk through the countryside, and ends with hospitality being offered and accepted. Maybe that's because it combines two things I enjoy a lot – walking and welcoming people into our home.

When I entered full-time ministry, it seemed right to Tony and me that we should continue to extend hospitality in our manses, as we had in our own homes. We hosted groups for social, spiritual and business gatherings so we could get to know each other in an informal and comfortable setting. We often commented how those occasions seem to bring about a closer fellowship at church, too.

So it seemed natural to us that when we began looking for a home to 'retire' to, there had to be enough space to invite people in. Offering hospitality has made coming to a new place so much easier for us. We invited our neighbours in for coffee at Christmas. We hosted a Lent group which then became a regular housegroup. We've held fundraising events in the garden, invited strangers to lunch. Yes, it can mean lots of washing up. But at least it gives us a reason to do that bit of cleaning that will otherwise be neglected!

'When they finally worked out who they'd been entertaining, their lives were completely turned around'

Those who met Jesus as they walked home from Jerusalem that first Easter Day invited Jesus into their home to share a simple supper. They were tired, hungry and thirsty. But they couldn't have known just how much their invitation meant to Jesus after all he'd just been through. When they finally worked out who they'd been entertaining, their lives were completely turned around. They found new energy and joy as they hurried back to Jerusalem. The change came about not from the walking and talking – although they must've learned much that way – but through their welcome and offer of refreshment.



Now retired, Revd Heather Walker has been a minister for 17 years. She has also been a superintendent and local preacher. Her daughter-in-law is Vice President of the Methodist Conference Rachel Lampard MBE.

'The change came about not from the walking and talking – but through their welcome and offer of refreshment'

Extending hospitality to others – even without the walking bit – can be a huge blessing to those who offer as well as those who receive. Inviting a neighbour in for a simple lunch can turn the drudgery of preparing a meal for one into a happy, social occasion. Meeting up for coffee with someone who looked sad or anxious at church can make life's issues seem bearable again.

One day, Abraham sat at the door of his tent, thinking. Three strangers came into view. Suddenly Abraham jumped into action – mostly by proxy as it was Sarah who did all the work. 'Visitors! Yes, please! You must come in and we'll chat and eat and generally put the world right together'.

Little could Abraham know that the three-person God would be his guest that day. That guest would make a promise to his hosts which would not only make Sarah laugh, but also change the course of history.

METHODISM IN OUR MADNESS

ARTS AND CULTURE BY CLIVE PRICE

She's one of the bestselling music artists of all time. And she was brought up a Methodist.

Beyoncé has sold more than 100 million records as a solo artist. She sold 60 million records as part of girl group Destiny's Child – who based their name on a passage from Isaiah. At the time of writing, Beyoncé's next 'hit' was to be the birth of her twins.

'I am about faith and spirituality more so than religion' is her mantra now. She is a target for criticism over her raunchy stage act and videos.

But as a child, Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter sang in the choir at St John's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas. St John's say they are 'church like you have never experienced it'. Their website claims their core culture is one of 'unconditional love'.

In a youtube video, pastor Rudy Rasmus recalls a day Beyoncé turned up for choir rehearsal. 'Here this person was, with this huge voice,' he says. 'She grabbed a mike and began to sing and everybody just stopped. It was a moment.'

Beyoncé and her family still make donations to the church's efforts to help the homeless, feed the poor and empower youth. According to the *Christian Post*, Rudy Rasmus praised the singer's charitable work, saying she'd made an impact because of her 'incredible heart'.

