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## **The Second Cup**

*By Sam Monaghan,*

Today we're marking MHA Methodist Homes Sunday, celebrating 83 years of the charity. The Methodist conference is currently meeting in Telford, and it was exactly 83 years ago at Methodist conference that MHA got its starting orders.

MHA is one of three charities born out of Methodism, along with Action for Children and All We Can. They are lived expressions of the compassion and quest for social justice at the heart and heritage of our church.

For the past eight years, I've been the chief executive of MHA. We work with around 14,500 people each year, providing care and support to meet their needs in body, in mind, and in spirit. We employ chaplains across all our 71 care homes and 59 retirement living settings, all funded from charitable donations. They are there for people of all faiths and those who wouldn't say they have a particular belief.

Many of those who live in our homes are living with dementia. Religious traditions can be an absolute anchor as many other memories fade. Visual symbolism can be such a trigger, a way of engaging people. Our chaplains often light a candle—a sign of Jesus the light of the world, a sign of gathering, a sign of joy, a sign of Jesus being with us whether things are good, uncertain, or sorrowful.

### **The Importance of Connections**

During our lives, we all form connections. Some of those connections will be really strong. They will make us who we are. They will help form our identity. They will help us become the people we are meant to be. They will sometimes rub off the rough edges we have. Sometimes they will enable us to be more than we ever thought we could be.

Connections will be companions. They will be comfort. They will be love lived out with us. Sometimes they will be very much felt as the experience of God walking with us in that companionship.

But as we all know, as we go through life, some of those connections we lose. Maybe we move away and people drift out of our lives. Sometimes we have a really big argument with them and burn the bridges. That's a real sadness—we're left with a sense of failure and frustration.

It can be that through illness our own mobility reduces and we're not able to maintain the friendships and connections we want. And brutally, there will be those we lose during our lives because they pass away, and they leave a huge hole in our lives.

What we find, particularly working in Methodist Homes, is that we meet an awful lot of people in the latter parts of their lives where a lot of those connections have been severed for all sorts of reasons. Their lives diminish because of the amount of social contact they have. Many are sitting alone in their homes with very few links, very few people coming around to see them.

## **The Purpose of MHA**

The reason MHA exists is that we seek to create services, whether it's in our care homes, in our retirement living schemes, or through our community activity, that make sure people still have some sense of place to be, some sense of connection that is committed to.

We want to say to people: we see you. We see that you have value as a human being. We see that you have needs for love, for companionship, for care. And we will walk alongside you and journey with you.

Eighty-three years ago, Reverend Walter Hall in Tottenham met a group of 12 women who were fearful for their physical well-being because they had no money and were worried they were going to end up going to work in the workhouse. He was galvanised by that and by God's spirit to try and do something about making sure those women did not feel destitute, did not feel alone, did not

feel invisible in the world, and did not suffer.

Today we're really proud to continue to do that. We reach out to thousands upon thousands of people who would otherwise have felt less connected, more invisible, alone. The organisation and all the people who have worked for us and volunteered for us through the years have been able to be God's hands, heart, and word to them.

## **The Gospel of Invitation**

The parable of the great dinner tells us about who Jesus thinks should be invited to the table. In the story, Jesus tells a tale at a dinner party where everyone watching knows exactly who should be there and exactly who should not.

At first it sounds like a story about hospitality, about a generous host and a great banquet. But the story Jesus tells quietly offends every assumption those watching him have in the room.

The master tells his servant: "Go out into the roads and lanes and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled."

This is about radical inclusion. This is about God's invitation to the table being extended not to the most worthy, not to those who deserve it, but to those who are often left out, forgotten, or invisible.

That's what MHA does. We believe that every person has value. Every person deserves to be seen. Every person deserves connection. Every person deserves to belong. And we are called to ensure that nobody feels invisible, nobody feels alone, and nobody feels without value.