

Band Ministry in the North Yorkshire Dales



Appointed to Hawes in 2010, and discovering that the town Silver Prize band practised regularly in the Market Hall, it seemed I had no option but to join their number as something I could become part of, away from church-related activities. Having played a trumpet in the High School wind band many years ago, and then spent a few months in an amateur dance band early on in my working life, I presumed Yorkshire brass banding would have some common ground – even when I had to pick up a cornet for the first time and 'fill-in' on the back row, as best I could!

Some weeks I thought learning Hebrew would come easier than playing brass band marches – always played at a quick march rate (or so it seemed) and the music was printed so small! However, as the years have passed I have come to appreciate the well-rounded sound Hawes Silver Prize band produces; practice has not made me perfect, far from it, but I understand how every member of the band listens to one another, and together, led by the masterful Stan Rookcroft, we are encouraged and enabled to make music folk want to hear.

Stan frequently personifies grace and patience during band rehearsals, as a wrong note is noticed, the piece is halted and the gentle phrase comes over our heads 'was that a mis-pitch?' With only three (or sometimes four) valves to choose from when playing any piece of music, slight variations in lips and breath can easily make for errors!

Credit must go to Stan Rookcroft, leader of Hawes Silver Prize Band, and his wife Barbara, who offer much time and patient encouragement to all musical ages and abilities, so that many people consistently support and attend events with which they are involved. This regular support of band functions provides an effective forum for outreach in the local community.

Hawes Silver Prize band have a fulsome annual calendar of engagements in the area: including playing on the stone milk-stand for Burtersett show, outside Aysgarth Village Institute for their annual fete on August Bank Holiday Monday – though in recent years inclement weather has resulted in the band retreating indoors to play, with many villagers enjoying the shelter as well as the sound in the hall!

During the previous day, on Sunday afternoon the band play for an hour on Bainbridge village green – a free outdoor concert for visitors and locals alike – then we decamp to the shores of Semerwater, only a few miles up Raydale but often a very different climate to that which we've experienced in Bainbridge, barely half an hour earlier! One memorable year the water level of the lake was so high, no shore was visible, so the service was held in the small Anglican Church at Stalling Busk, where congregation and band members squeezed alongside one another, playing hymns amongst those who were gathered. Amazingly the roof stayed intact!

Annually, Aysgarth Methodist Chapel also invite the band to accompany a Songs Of Praise service in the Village Institute and, although I plan the service, it is always delivered by local chapel members (of which there are less than a dozen active members), so I could remain amongst the band and, in this place, I'm content to be identified as representing the church in the community. So this does become incarnational as well as being in good company.

November brings the United Remembrance Service in the Parish Church, for which the band provide the music. On these occasions I wear my band jacket but with a black clerical shirt beneath, in preparation for my contribution to the service that follows. 'Incarnational' was the reaction I received from colleagues at the District Synod, which I can now accept as a fair description of what I originally viewed as my chosen role in the band, rather than representing the church in the community.

The Christmas concert in the Market Hall completes the year, only after we've played carols outside to herald the arrival of Father Christmas – on the back of a local tractor rather than a sledge, but some years a sledge might have been more appropriate!

Members of the band have become good friends, with conversations of faith emerging after accompanying a harvest service, or outdoor songs of praise, always with a Methodist identity – which led one member, of Catholic origins, to comment recently 'you always get a good sermon in your church, much better than ours'!

Playing in the band could be termed just a lot of hot air attempting to make music – but after seven years with this band of, generally, happy folk, I suspect this group of people have much to teach the church. Meet together regularly, practice, listen to each other and the advice and wisdom of the person in charge, leading the band, and never be afraid to try something new – even if it sounds terrible at first!

Easter Sunday 2017 found me leading a sunrise service on a hillside just outside Leyburn, celebrating Holy Communion at services during the day, which concluded with band practice and a new piece, *You Raise me up*, being introduced that same evening – ministry within ministry!

*When I am down, and, oh, my soul, so weary
When troubles come, and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until you come and sit awhile with me*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas
I am strong when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be*

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*Revd Janet Park
Superintendent, North Yorkshire Dales Methodist Circuit*