

## **Question: How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?**

☒ How dare you change the light bulb - my grandmother donated it 50 years ago! ☒ Seven - that's the number CPD requires to make the meeting quorate. ☒ Change??!!

It is an old joke with various punchlines, but nearly all imply that change is something we struggle with in the life of the church. But that is completely understandable: the world around us seems to change at such a pace that it is immensely comforting to know that some things don't; that the music, hymns, worship and traditions we enjoy have been the same for generations.

After all we believe in an unchanging God: the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Yet don't we also worship the God of creation who continually makes all things new? Will we not celebrate the coming of Christ who offers a new relationship with God for all? And don't we rejoice at the gift of the Holy Spirit who inspires and challenges our faith continually? Our God maybe unchanging but his work in the world is not.

It can feel sometimes that we are caught in a dilemma: we long for the light of God's love to continue shining in the world, but to change the light bulb seems like a risky business! Perhaps the key to this dilemma is in our understanding of who we are called to be. We are not called to be the upholders of a tradition but the bearers of a grace; we are not to keep the light safe for ourselves but let it burn for others. For me, the identity of the church comes down to two words: 'Transformational community'

We are a transformational community because we are made up of individuals who are transformed by the love and the grace of God. We come to church not because we are good but because we know we need God; we rely on his love & forgiveness to enable us to be fully human and so gradually we are changed people. Grace transforms us.

But belonging to a community is transformative too. When we listen to other views; are affirmed and supported; have a sense of belonging; we become changed people. One of the great blessings of AMC is that we have members who are from many different backgrounds and from all over the world; people with different experiences of life and faith, people who hold varied political opinions and who each have a different view on 'how things should be done'.

Our media suggest that we should all be at loggerheads with each other, but instead, through valuing what each brings, we create a community that transforms - even if sometimes it's hard work!

And finally, we are a transformative community because we change the flavour of Aylesbury by our very presence. Through support of those in need; an openness to those who don't belong; through generosity, hospitality, practical care and prayerful listening, we change the landscape around us. When we truly believe the church exists, not for ourselves, but for those who do not yet belong, we cannot help but transform.

So the question remains: How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?

Well, perhaps if we are a people changed by God's grace, living as a loving & caring community together, and always seeking the best for those who are beyond our walls; perhaps if we truly are a transformational community, then the light bulb will never need changing, for God's light will always shine from us.

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