



CLIFF COLLEGE — AN AMAZING JOURNEY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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CLIFF COLLEGE PRINCIPAL ASHEY COOPER REFLECTS ON THE WORK OF CLIFF AND HOW GOD IS LEADING IT WITH CONFIDENCE INTO THE FUTURE.

I honestly think the role I currently fulfil as a Presbyterian in the Methodist Church is one of the best: to serve as the Principal of Cliff College for the last 4 years has been both the most rewarding and the most challenging of my life. To be part of Cliff's story and help shape it for the future feels an awesome responsibility. Every day that I sit in the Principal's study I feel the weight of history and the expectations of students and friends of the college calling us into the future. As with every other institution or movement of which I have been a part, we cannot simply rest on who we once were or try and do things the way they used to be done. Instead we must look back with gratitude and learn from our history whilst discerning the Spirit and the Spirit's voice, who is calling forward with boldness.

So, as I begin this article, it is important to look back at the journey so far...

THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

In 1903 the Wesleyan Methodist Church took responsibility for 'Joyful News Home and Mission' and purchased Cliff College for the training of evangelists. Since that date, the college has undergone many changes, both in its

role and appearance, but it has always retained evangelism and mission at its heart. This has been lived out through a range of training programmes, a focus on evangelistic mission and through gathering people together for worship and teaching. We have retained a commitment to serving the church and training disciples effectively to communicate the gospel in a contemporary context.

In 1993 the college first offered academic programmes, initially validated by the University of Sheffield and then by the University of Manchester. Since that time, the challenges of being a small alternative provider have increased, both in terms of regulation and the nature of the market in which the college operates. The validation relationship with the University of Manchester was strengthened in 2018 when Cliff was identified as one of two alternate providers that the university were happy to continue to validate.

In 2013, a review of learning and development across the Methodist Church, the Fruitful Field Project, led to the college being identified as one of the two learning centres of the Methodist Church. This strengthened the relationship between Cliff and the Methodist Church and has brought a renewed desire to identify and recognise the role of the college within the church. This relationship has been strengthened in recent years through a number of Cliff staff working closely

with the Connexional Team, particularly the Children, Youth and Family Team, the Evangelism and Growth Team, the Global Relationships Team and the Ministries Cluster.

The review of the College's international work in 2018 led to the recognition that an online approach to learning was the most appropriate method of serving partner churches. Therefore, a learning platform, 'TheologyX', was developed in response to this need. This platform has enhanced our global work but has also enabled the college to use the same technology to deliver its current programmes online and to develop a more hybrid model of learning that is available to all students. Having already developed this platform as part of our discerning the voice of God, it put Cliff in a very strong position to face the challenges of 2020 and a global pandemic with a sense of optimism and positivity. This platform has enabled many of our partners not only to survive this crisis but also to thrive in the midst of it.

WHO ARE WE NOW?

During these last few months, we have been exploring the college's future and developing a new vision for the next part of our journey as a college. A key part of that discernment has been to identify clearly our 'raison d'être'. So, I am excited to be able to share with you our new Identity Statement which expresses who we are now and the things that will be our priority as we journey into the

future as Cliff. As you read, I hope you will see both the shaping of history and the prompting of the Spirit who calls us into new adventures.

Cliff College: A Global Centre for Evangelism and Missiology

Cliff College is a Methodist evangelical learning community which is rooted in God's Word and Spirit for the purpose of equipping God's people for practical ministry and cutting-edge missional engagement.

Theological – our emphasis as a college and as a community is on discipleship – both personal, as we pursue God in our individual faith journeys, and social, as we seek to offer Christ to the world and maintain our historic motto: 'Christ for all – All for Christ'. Our commitment to discipleship shapes us for mission in today's world. We stand in a tradition of Wesleyan holiness and charismatic renewal, with the Word as our light and the Spirit as our guide. This enables us to welcome students, staff and visitors from a variety of church backgrounds with open arms. We encourage everyone to join us in the adventure of faith as we learn and grow together as a community. We are part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain and operate as one of their training institutions, with a particular calling to serve global Methodism. We are also a member of the Evangelical Alliance.

Academic – Cliff was birthed from a desire to train and equip God's people to reach others with the good news of Jesus. As the college has developed over more than a century, we have maintained this passion and calling. As we look to the future, we rejoice in the ways that evangelism and mission remain deeply rooted within every area of the college's life and community. Pursuing this ongoing calling involves the need for academic rigour, to prepare our students for the unique challenges of mission in today's world. Our partnership with the University of Manchester has enabled us to challenge and develop our students to this end as they study for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, while our Short Course and CliffYear programmes offer high quality teaching and learning to help equip the wider Church. This commitment to learning is not for mere academic speculation; rather, we participate in



theological formation that shapes our thinking, our worship, our prayer, and our lifestyles.

The education we offer at Cliff is theology for the real world: rooted in practice, forged in community, grounded in the authority of scripture and consistently prompting us to face outwards. We proclaim the gospel and invite everyone to experience the life-changing transformation of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This identity is underpinned by holding the following values as expressed in the commitments of Cliff College's historic charisms:

- Evangelistic zeal: commitment to spread Scriptural Holiness and proclaim the evangelical faith.
- Wesleyan holiness: commitment to the entire transformation of heart and life by the Spirit.
- Evangelical theology: commitment to scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice.
- Kingdom praxis: commitment to put into action discipleship that is missional, accountable and radical.
- Community of grace-led hospitality: commitment to build up one another in Christ.
- Discipleship: commitment to a distinctive character built on learning, discipleship, mission preparation and caring for one another through prayer, worship and hospitality.

This identity can be explored through the following three words that will be used to underpin our life and work as we journey forward:

Encounter : Equip : Engage

ENCOUNTER

- daily prayer and weekly celebration available both on-site and online
- an annual festival of word, worship, learning and music, available on-site and online
- a weekly discipleship programme available to all members of the Cliff community
- the Cliff Year: a gap year programme consisting of evangelism, mission and vocational exploration
- a programme of 'global immersion' trips

EQUIP

- a portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes
- a selection of specialist courses, both validated and non-validated, for those in ministry roles
- support for global partners: learning and equipping
- Cliff Local: a full programme of local learning and community building designed to strengthen and equip those in local lay leadership
- a variety of UK and global research opportunities
- a learning platform that enables a variety of organisations to offer online learning

ENGAGE

- a programme of local missional activities
- a missional support programme offered to churches throughout the UK
- the support and enabling of online church
- a vibrant conference centre providing catered accommodation to groups and individuals

- camping, caravan and self-catering accommodation allowing access to the beautiful Cliff College site
- a community of businesses and individuals based on the college site

FACING THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE

As we emerge from a global pandemic, we hope not only to have survived, but to have strengthened our vision and clearly discerned what God is asking of us as we move forward. It is important to state that Cliff remains committed to its historic calling both to train evangelists and to share the 'Joyful News' of the gospel. This must look different in 2021 than it did in 1903/1904. Our work, both at home and abroad, must change and develop as it supports a shifting culture, but our passion and desire to see transformation in both individuals, communities, the nation and around the world has not diminished and will not diminish while I sit in this chair. We will place evangelism and mission at the centre of everything we do. Evangelism will be central to each of our programmes and academic offerings.

As we develop a new 'Global Centre for Evangelism and Missiology', we will explore relationships with agencies, with those engaged in cutting edge mission, and those involved in developing new and exciting models of mission and evangelism - both in the UK and around the world. We will work alongside MET and all others who have a passion to see a lost world redeemed and who long for people to find that hope is only found in Jesus Christ.

This renewed emphasis on the whole college engaging in evangelism and mission is central to the work of our Evangelism Team. The Cliff Evangelists, alongside myself and the college staff will commit ourselves to exploring new ways of engaging with local churches, circuits and districts to work together in both sharing and being 'Joyful News' for many years to come.

The Revd Ashley Cooper has been Principal of Cliff College since September 2017, having previously served as the Superintendent of the Burslem Mission Circuit and worked as part of the Evangelism Team for the Methodist Church. He is also the Chaplain at Port Vale Football Club in his spare time and exploring church planting in his home town of Leek.



LISTEN FOR
God's
 VOICE IN
 EVERYTHING
YOU DO,
 EVERYWHERE
 YOU GO;
He IS
 THE ONE
 WHO WILL KEEP
 YOU ON TRACK.

Proverbs 3:6
 THE MESSAGE

