

## Meet The Members: December 2023

### The Rev. Dr. Keith Albans



As I write this I am approaching the third Advent and Christmas since I retired and moved up to Newcastle upon Tyne. I am a Methodist Presbyterian who left theological college in 1984 having previously studied Chemistry at Oxford and Southampton. I served in York, Birmingham and Sheffield before returning to York. I am a widower, with two adult children and two grandchildren, and a mother who lives in a residential care home in Nottingham. I am a volunteer driver for the National Trust, an avid follower of most sports, with a particular passion for cricket, and I also enjoy singing and walking, although that latter activity is somewhat curtailed owing to an on-going leg injury.

In that brief precis I mentioned Birmingham and Sheffield, and it was those two appointments which are probably the most influential on me finding myself involved once again in Christians on Ageing, having previously served on the Executive back in the noughties. In Birmingham I spent five years as University Chaplain as well as being involved in producing and sometimes presenting the Sunday Breakfast programme on Radio WM. Both aspects gave me insights into exercising ministry outside of the confines of the organised Church, with a particular opportunity to explore Chaplaincy. By contrast, the Sheffield appointment involved ministry in a large suburban church plus the circuit superintendency, although I was also involved as relief presenter/producer for Radio Sheffield's Sunday Breakfast show.

One weekly activity within the church was a luncheon club for older people, and through it I became fascinated with the random and wide-ranging conversations that ensued over lunch. People shared their stories and experiences, and bore witness to richly diverse lives which, though very ordinary, nonetheless gave insights into things which had generally been consigned to history. I also remember one particular woman whose attitude to getting older was proclaimed in her oft-repeated assertion that "they should shoot you once you get to 90!" Whenever I asked her should fire the gun, she acknowledged the dilemma, and I was pleased in time to attend her 90th birthday party. And then, in 1999, I saw an advert for the role of Senior Chaplain with MHA – Methodist Homes for the Aged. I applied and, to my surprise, I was appointed and it was role in which I worked for 16 years. As well as developing the Chaplaincy service in the care homes and housing schemes, the role required developing an understanding of supporting the spiritual lives of older people, and I was also able, with colleagues, to develop a training programme for staff and volunteers around dying and death. I travelled widely in the UK working with local churches and other groups, and I also had the opportunity to travel overseas for study and to attend conferences.

In 2013 SCM published a book, *God, me and being very old*, which I co-edited with Prof. Malcolm Johnson. It brought together some 15 faith stories of older people, as shared with our chaplains, and reflection on the issues those stories raised.

I left MHA in 2017 and returned to a local church appointment in York before retiring in 2021, but it was the 21 years I spent in chaplaincy, and in particular the 16 years with MHA, which were the most formative years for me as a minister and as a disciple of Jesus. And I know that understanding and supporting later life discipleship is something which, although the church has regularly undervalued it, is of huge importance, and in which, I believe, Christians on Ageing has a vital role to play.

*The Rev. Dr. Keith Albans*