



**Kate Cook** has been Superintendent Minister in Telford Methodist Circuit since 2016. A professional classical singer and music teacher by background, she began training as a local preacher but 'suddenly felt a very strong call to presbyteral ministry' and was ordained eight years ago. She has been instrumental in Telford's circuit-wide **HOLY HABITS** journey, which began when Andrew Roberts went to talk to the circuit team about the original *Holy Habits* book.



## THE STORY begins...

'When Andrew came to talk to the team, he told us he was in the process of developing, with others, a set of resources, one for each habit, for use in churches. Some people were keen for us to start working with Holy Habits right away, but we decided to wait and see what the new resources were like and whether they'd be useful for us. When they were published by BRF in early 2018, we got some sets almost immediately. We spent a staff meeting looking at them and very quickly decided that we wanted to do this, right across the circuit, involving all 20 churches.'

'The original book was very readable but still grounded in scripture, with lots of modern-day anecdotes and examples, which made it very accessible, and we felt the new resources kept the same tone and balance. There were ways into café worship and Sunday worship, as well as Messy Church and Bible study groups. We liked how comprehensive and practical the booklets were, with so many ideas that we could run with or tweak to use in our own context.'

The Telford staff team decided to do the habits in the order in which they come in Acts 2, and to do all ten habits in one year, 'because we felt we might lose a bit of energy over two years'.

**'It's been a very positive thing for the whole Circuit because of the real sense that we were all doing this together.'**

Telford Circuit is large and diverse, but it was important to the team that all 20 churches were involved. As Kate explains: 'The circuit is 25 miles north to south and 22 miles across, a sort of diamond shape, between the Welsh borders and Birmingham. The southern end is Shropshire market towns and quite rural, and the north is more urban and much more ethnically diverse. I feel it's been a very positive thing for the whole circuit because of the real sense that we were all doing this together.'

Key to the success of the project was to get local preachers on board, as they would be responsible for the majority of Sunday services. The church helped local preachers to buy the resources with a 50% subsidy and set up discussion groups for them a month before each habit 'went live'.



Artwork from the final celebration

'We'd look at the resources together to share ideas and thoughts, so it became a training opportunity as well. I think some local preachers have surprised themselves by how much they've gained from doing Holy Habits – how much they've grown. Some may have begun thinking, "Oh, well, the Superintendent is telling us we need to do this, so we'd better give it a go," but then have really enjoyed it and learned a lot from it, so I feel it's been a positive experience for us all.'

'I was talking to one of my congregations and they said they loved the way that each of the four preachers on the four Sundays of the month would bring out a

different aspect of a particular habit. They enjoyed the variety of it, and they felt that as the year went on they began to see the links between the habits more closely. They're cumulative.'

Holy Habits has been positive for Kate's own ministry too: 'The benefit for me is that it's freed me from the lectionary – perhaps I shouldn't say that! When I started preaching, I committed myself to preaching from the lectionary for the majority of the time. I've enjoyed being freed from that and I've enjoyed the way in which the booklets have encouraged me to think about how people can embed these habits in their daily lives. We always have this challenge: how to ensure that what people experience on Sundays doesn't drain away as they walk out through the church doors; how to ensure that what they've learned lives in them daily, wherever they happen to be. Holy Habits has encouraged us to think more about that.'

'Holy Habits has run alongside another initiative we had in the circuit to encourage the churches to look more at their mission and to do some thinking and some vision action planning. It's interesting to see where those two things have come together: where studying a particular habit has encouraged a church to think, maybe, that as part of our mission we could start a mums and toddlers group, or we could support our local food bank more, or we could do this, that or the other. That's been a real benefit, encouraging churches to think through not only how they're living out the habits in their daily lives, but also how they're helping their communities.'

Holy Habits has been a rich and varied learning experience: 'We have tried to root Holy Habits in the different contexts, but I do think we could have done more if we'd been smarter. It often happens: you do something and then you think, "Oh, we could have done that instead." But that's all part of the learning curve. In hindsight, we could have spent longer thinking about how we would do this in practice and how we could make the most of the resources on offer. But it was as it was.'

**As the year went on people began to see the links between the habits more closely. They're cumulative.**

Telford's year of exploring Holy Habits came to an end in July 2019, with a special circuit celebration.

Over the summer, the staff team will be talking about the next steps and how to take their Holy Habits experience and learning forward. Those plans will be informed by feedback from the congregations, like this, from a recent café worship service: 'On Sunday I asked



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**Holy Habits celebration cake!**

the people sitting around the tables to spend five minutes talking about what Holy Habits had meant to them. They came back saying: we began to see the links between the habits; we began to think more carefully about our prayer life, about how and when we were reading scripture; we began to think about how all the different things we do from Monday to Saturday are also acts of worship. For example, the church runs a mums and toddlers group three times a week, and they began to see that the work they do there is not just befriending these young mums; it's deeper than that: it's about welcome and hospitality and generosity. So they've set up a prayer box so the mums can write down their prayer needs, pop them in the box and know that they will be prayed for. That's been a very useful connection for them.



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**Handprints reflecting fellowship**

'It's not been rocket science, and that's what I like about Holy Habits: it's very accessible and starts where people are at. You're not asking them to address difficult things, just the basics. Somebody did say that Holy Habits was like a "back-to-basics" course. It reminds us of what it means to be a disciple.' **HH**

**We hope you've enjoyed this HOLY HABITS story!**