

Story and Song

ANDREW STOBART



The new Principal of Cliff College, Andrew Stobart introduces the focus of this year's Cliff Festival.

Long before I knew anything about Cliff College (or had any inkling that one day I would be entrusted with the role of Principal), I used to play my way through an old copy of *Cliff Choruses* that my parents had stowed in the stool of the piano. As a ten-year old who regularly played the organ for services in the rural Methodist chapels around my home, I didn't fully appreciate *why* these choruses connected with congregations so well, but I knew that they *did*.

Three decades later, sitting at the principal's desk in Cliff College, I understand more fully why *Cliff Choruses* was – and is – such a beloved volume. The songs connected people to a story. Perhaps a Cliff Trek came to their church and that was when they first made a commitment to follow Jesus; perhaps they had attended the Whitsun anniversary weekend, or a Derwent Week, and experienced the renewal of God's Spirit; perhaps they had even been a student at Cliff for a year and discovered a lifetime's vocation as a preacher and evangelist. *Cliff Choruses* isn't just an old collection of songs; it is a testament to stories of transformation. The College's other noteworthy publication, Joyful News, told many of these stories week by week for eighty years.

'Story and Song' is our theme for Cliff Festival this year, picking up inspiration from the Methodist Church's President and Vice-President of Conference. Over the late May bank holiday weekend, over 800 people will gather in the Peak District to study the Scriptures, sing out our hearts in praise, and enjoy fellowship, learning

and activities for all ages. There's still time for you to make plans to join us!

The format of our work may have changed since the first Joyful News was published 143 years ago, but Cliff College's purpose remains the same: **to inspire and equip ambassadors of the joyful news of Jesus**. The transformation needed in our lives, our churches and our society will not come from a cunning plan or a shiny strategy. Transformation happens when we personally encounter Jesus, and when we make ample space in our lives for Jesus' word and power – Scripture and the Spirit (Colossians 3:16-17).

We sing and tell stories because that's what humans do. We sing and tell stories about Jesus because that's what Christians do. We sing and tell stories *about the change that Jesus is bringing about in our world* because that's what Methodists do. 'Story and Song' is an anthem to focus us as we seek to live boldly in Christian faith today. If you or your church want to explore how Cliff College can resource and support you, then please be in touch. Together, let's tell and sing the joyful news that transforms the world: 'Christ for all; all for Christ.'

REV DR ANDREW STOBART

Andrew is the Principal of Cliff College, having previously served as Academic Vice Principal. A Methodist presbyter and theologian, he sees his vocation as equipping God's people to share the joyful news of Jesus with clarity rooted in deep understanding. He can be contacted by email: principal@cliffcollege.ac.uk

