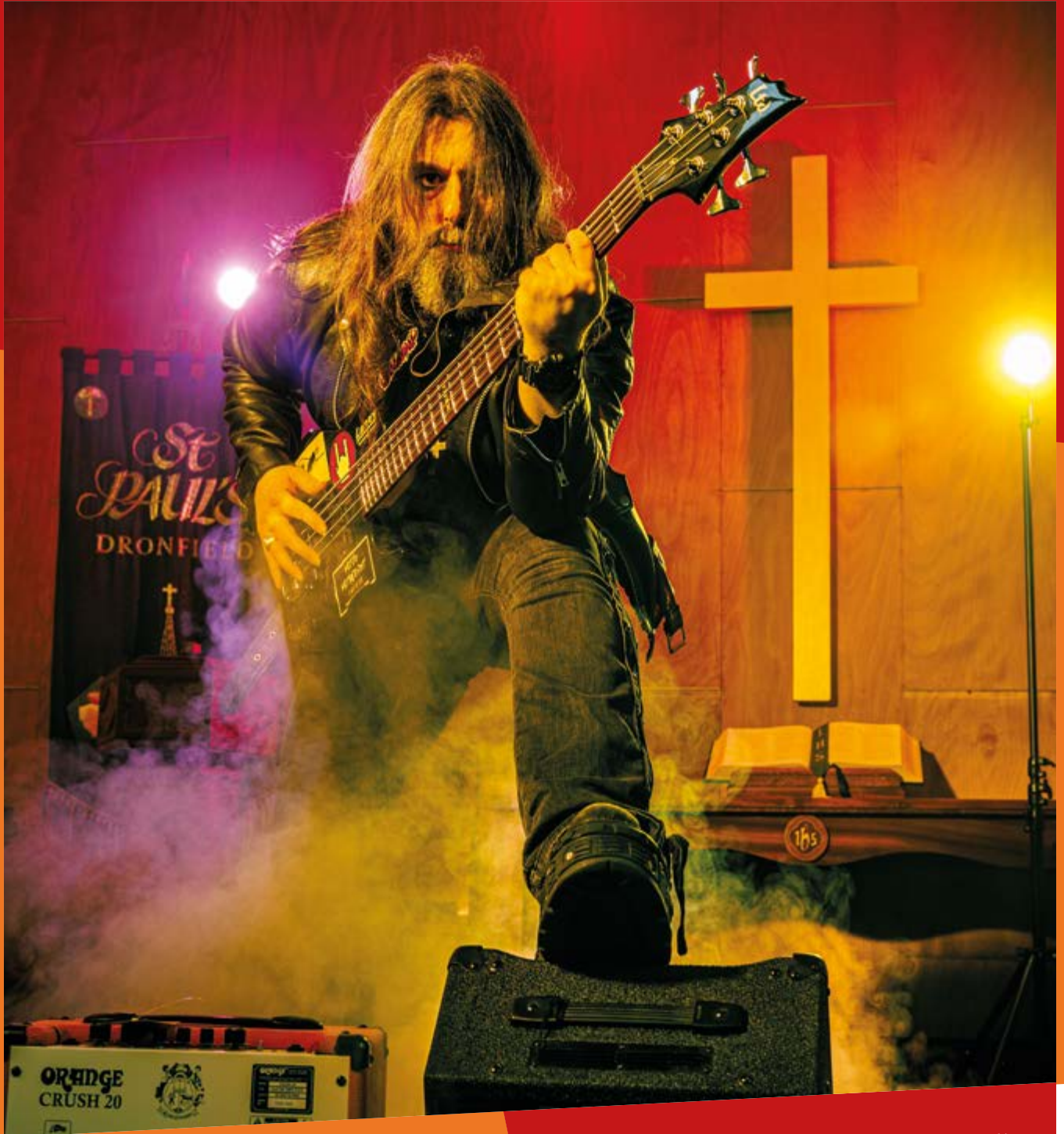


# THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



SHOWING OUR METTLE

The **Methodist** Church



The Revd James Morley is the minister of several churches in the Sheffield Methodist Circuit and also coordinates Metal Methodist, [metalmethodist.co.uk](http://metalmethodist.co.uk)

# Showing the Church's mettle

As the Church's New Places for New People initiative continues to gather momentum, the Revd James Morley explains the origins of a faith space for heavy metal music fans, and looks ahead to returning to 3Generate, the Church's national youth assembly.



**I** didn't fit in at school. I was one of those kids who was singled out by other pupils and made to feel like an outsider.

At the same time, I was starting to question whether or not God was real. As a Methodist minister's son, I'd been brought up to believe in God. But, as I journeyed closer to adult independence, I knew I needed to make up my own mind.

Wanting to rebel against my Christian upbringing, I found myself rejecting faith and religion for a while. Feeling outcast and alone, I started listening to heavy metal music. This led me to discover a geographically dispersed community of music-lovers who placed an emphasis on being different, so I felt at home with them.

## Commitment

Eventually, I made a faith commitment and decided to dedicate my life to God – hence I've been a Methodist minister since 2013. But that didn't mean I stopped enjoying listening to heavy metal.

When it comes to culture and faith, I believe the Methodist Church is well placed to say "yes" to both rather than "either or".

People who aren't very familiar with metal music probably think all the songs are about darkness and evil, but there are good and bad elements in every sub-culture. As with everything, we must exercise discernment. While there are some bands that claim to be satanic, a lot of metal music draws upon biblical imagery and is about battling evil and searching for goodness. There's even a handful of UK Christian metal bands.

While on a sabbatical in 2021, I was reading about aspects of Western culture, including metal music. I thought to myself "God has given us the gift of music and we should celebrate it and use it for good, recognising that God can speak through any genre."

## Online prayer

Soon afterwards, I was leading some online prayer meetings and began thinking about how I could use the internet to connect metal music fans with the gospel.

In 2022, the then Youth President of the Methodist Church, James Carver, encouraged me to develop my ideas. So, towards the end of that year, I formally launched Metal Methodist – an online faith space aimed at metal enthusiasts.



A few people joined the first livestreamed event, so I was encouraged to continue. Some of those original participants were from my local Methodist circuit, while others lived further afield. One of them later told me they'd grown up as part of a church but had decided, earlier on the day of the livestream, to call it quits with religion. They had then seen a Facebook post about the event and decided to give it one last go. They have since remained part of our congregation, been baptised and become a member of the Methodist Church!

The growing number of people engaging with Metal Methodist, which now includes livestreamed face-to-face gatherings, are a mix of atheists who visit for the interviews with musicians, people open to learning about Christianity, people seeking a relationship with God, and Christians who feel they don't fit into a traditional church environment.

## Welcoming

I think people connect with a welcome that's for everyone and recognises that God can speak to people in all kinds of ways, including through heavy metal. It's vital that metal fans know that they don't need to change their music or aesthetic to be a Christian.

I'm thrilled that, for the second year running, I'll be taking the essence of Metal Methodist to 3Generate, the Church's national event for young people, at Birmingham NEC from 4 to 6 October.

There may be young people out there who are struggling to find a sense of belonging. Some may be carrying heavy burdens, so it's my aim to provide a space at 3Generate where they can talk to God about their troubles, consider how they could ask people they trust for help, and hear that they're not alone.



*A lot of metal music draws upon biblical imagery and is about battling evil*

If you feel inspired to explore if God may be nudging the church you are part of to begin a New Place for New People – a Christian community for those not yet part of an existing church – you can find out more at [methodist.org.uk/NPNP](https://methodist.org.uk/NPNP). Tickets for 3Generate, for young people aged 8 to 18, along with 4 to 7-year-olds accompanied by a guardian (in a specially allocated space), can be booked at [3Generate.org.uk](https://3Generate.org.uk)