

Reflection

Seeing the spiritual

The Revd Rob Drost has been Chaplain at Woodhouse Grove School since September 2022. He thanks the previous chaplain, the Revd Vicky Atkins, as well as Professor Ann Sumner, Corinne Miller, Verity Smith and other members of the Methodist Modern Art Collection Management Committee for their hard work on the 'Roper Project', which was installed in summer 2022. You can discover more about the Methodist Modern Art Collection at methodist.org.uk/artcollection

The Revd Rob Drost reflects on four splendid pieces from Frank Roper's *Stations of the Cross*, which are part of the Modern Methodist Art Collection and are on loan to Woodhouse Grove School where he is Chaplain.

My former boss, the Rt Revd Nick Holtam, recently retired Bishop of Salisbury, was once struggling with a group of lads he was preparing for confirmation in East London. But then he took them to the National Gallery and showed them some of the rich art depicting the Christmas story, and they got it.

Sometimes words just do not capture what we want to express, but a stroke of a brush and a dab of paint can. Most of us can find worth and meaning in art. In fact, sometimes people lose themselves in a work of art, becoming completely absorbed by what it is saying to them. You are probably thinking of a piece right now that is full of meaning and joy. Art is personal. It speaks to us differently, whether we are old or young, an artist or someone who can't even draw a straight line.

Roper sculptures

Frank Roper was a sculptor and the Methodist Modern Art Collection owns four aluminium reliefs from a set he made of *Stations of the Cross*. To mark its 60th anniversary last year, the Collection loaned these to Woodhouse Grove School, which is in Yorkshire where Roper was born. *Stations of the Cross* are 14 images depicting Jesus Christ on his way to his crucifixion. The 'stations' or stopping points, grew out of imitations of the *Via Dolorosa* in Jerusalem, a traditional processional route symbolising the path Jesus is believed to have walked to Mount Calvary. It aims to help people imagine what contemporary passers-by must have felt.

Station IV (top right) This shows Mary meeting her son Jesus on the road. The Bible does not actually mention Mary as being on the road, but in Luke 2, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus as a child for a naming ceremony and the Temple priest prophesied that one day her emotions will be so shattered it will be like a sword piercing her soul. Perhaps he was alluding to what it would be like to encounter her son on the road to his death.

Station VII (right) We are not sure how many times Jesus falls and stumbles. Matthew 27 reports there was a man called Simon who helped Jesus to carry his cross.

Station XIII In Roman tradition after someone

died on a cross, the body was taken down and left and sometimes no one came to bury them. There is no mention of Jesus being taken down from the cross, perhaps because the early readers knew the tradition and did not need to be told. In Matthew 27 we read that there were people who knew Jesus at the foot of the cross, weeping for their friend. This is repeated in Mark 15 from verse 40 and in Luke 23:49.

Station XIV This final sculpture features the scene in Matthew 27:57 when Joseph from Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. He wrapped it in cloth and placed it in his own unused tomb, which was carved out of the side of a hill. A large stone was then placed over the entrance. This story is also told in Mark 15 and in Luke 23. Joseph is named as an important person who disagreed that Jesus should be killed. The story also features in John 19 with the extra detail that Nicodemus, who met Jesus when he was alive, was there, helping Joseph.

Value of art

As well as Frank Roper's sculptures, we are hugely blessed in our school chapel with wonderful stained glass in the choir area above the communion table. It tells the story of the birth of Jesus, through to his visit as a boy to the Temple, where he questioned the leaders.

Gazing on art like this can give a fresh perspective on the life of Jesus and of the Church. It can lead us on a private pilgrimage into belief and faith. That faith is expressed through worship, where we draw near to the divine, which in turn inspires us. We are then sent out into our communities to continue to be the Church in the same tradition as the early disciples, who broke bread, prayed, fed the hungry and championed the undervalued.

We try to teach these values to our students today, so they might become agents of change now and in the future. Our daily chapel assembly worship challenges and celebrates our school community, asking big questions around what difference we as individuals and as a school can make in the world.

Our Methodist values speak of how our school can "do all the good we can" on a daily basis, believing that these words hold us firm to the teaching of God through the life of Jesus and the guidance of Scripture.



Station IV, Jesus meets his blessed Mother



Station VII, Jesus falls for the second time



Station XIII, The deposition (Jesus taken down from the cross)



Station XIV, The entombment (Jesus is laid in the sepulchre)