**Synod Highlights**

The Representative Synod of the East Anglia District met at Trinity Methodist Church, Lowestoft, hosted by the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Circuit. It was largely in person but around 25 people joined by Zoom, partly as it is a long way to Lowestoft (the most easterly point in Britain) from the very west of the District (e.g. Huntingdon). The theme of Synod was “**Justice-Seeking Church**”.

The opening worship was led by our Chair of District, Revd Julian Pursehouse, who referred to the Presidential theme of **hidden treasures** and shared a prayer from the Methodist Prayer Handbook. Julian showed an image of “La Barque Mystique – by Odilon Redon” and shared some thoughts around it. It looks like a boat striking out into the deep and at the start of the Connexional year we may have some choppy waters and storms to negotiate. We are invited to step into the boat and strike out into the deep in the company of God. We lean into God as God leans into us.

We welcomed those Ministers who are new to our District, our new District Property Secretary and noted that Revd Catherine Dixon is now a Superintendent Minister. We also welcomed some lay people who were at Synod for the first time as Circuit representatives. The list of dispensations was read out and it was agreed to send letters to various people – several were, sadly, of condolence but a couple were diamond wedding celebrations.

We watched the **Justice-Seeking Church** video after Julian had introduced the theme. Synod then broke into buzz groups to consider various questions relating to the priorities. There was a very healthy buzz around the Church and written answers were captured and will be collated later. This all fits in with our District Vision Statement. Synod Members were invited to share a few thoughts from their discussions and these included that it can be worse being poor in a generally affluent area as the support may not be there, problems with lack of public transport, banks closing and poor internet access in rural areas, a plea to write to the authorities about keeping the environment clean, a plea to “do” and not just “talk”, the need to reinforce dignity and worth in relations with those seeking refuge and a plea for the District Policy Committee (DPC) to express concern that the Government is backtracking on its environmental pledges. *Update - The DPC did consider this but felt that since Synod the Joint Public Issues Team had already done this on behalf of the Methodist Church.*

We watched a video from the Methodist “**Action for Hope**” initiative which has a target of becoming a net zero carbon emissions church by 2030. This suggested five steps to take – sign up for Eco-Church, change energy supplier to one that provides renewable energy, hold a worship service on caring for creation (resources are on their webpage), share your passion for God’s creation and consider how your Church can be carbon-reducing.

We watched the **Conference highlights** video. Revd Robert Roberts shared a little about his Conference experience. He has been pleased to be a representative for the last three years. He gave a plug for the Presidential and Vice Presidential addresses that are still available to watch as are the short bible studies. We shared a photo of Deacon Linda Kinchenton with our Conference buddy, Brian Bird, who (with his wife) had travelled for 3 or 4 days to get to Birmingham from the Solomon Islands. Revd Richman Ncube from the West Norfolk Circuit was congratulated on being accepted into Full Connexion at Conference.

Conference passed a resolution to request all Connexional and District Committees to consider the implications for them if provisions for predominantly **online churches** were to be made to the Conference and to submit their observations and comments to the Secretary of the Faith & Order Committee by 31 January 2024.

The Synod Secretary invited Members of Synod to share their thoughts around **online church**. The discussion included that online church is here to stay and please think about EDI/JDS when developing an online presence, online church is helpful for people with disabilities, consider the implications of doctrine for online communion, there is something special about meeting in person and for work with pioneers/NPNP digital is really important and it may not be possible to gather in person but it is still a “proper church”. Also there can be a deprivation around communion if not allowed online, the technology needs to be good, regular prayer times online work well and online tends to be a new church rather than a replacement. A Supernumerary who has the privilege of taking extended communion out to people wondered where the personal ministry would come in, all available resources should be used and where hybrid is used those online could receive a personal visit afterwards.

In response to one of the comments our Chair of District said that the theology of real presence is difficult and we are still in a trial period regarding online communion. At the 2024 Conference there will be a definitive statement on its validity and status. The theology of mediation by the Holy Spirit will be explored by the Faith & Order Committee.

Conference passed several resolutions in relation to **children and young people** including that it calls on all Methodists actively to engage in conversation with children and young people about faith and life. The Synod Secretary asked Synod Members to encourage attendance at 3Generate (which the District will pay the costs for), said the District is planning to look at a strategy for youth ministry and is seeking people with a heart for children and young people to volunteer to be involved in this and asked people to consider how conversation with children and young people about faith and life could be enabled.

A discussion followed and included a personal testimony that a retired deaconess had been a great influence in someone’s young faith journey so we should not say we are too old and we all have a story to share with young people, our District Mission Enabler said she has had three conversations with churches with youth work who are seeking funding to grow it, others said many have children and grandchildren to talk to about God, we need a District gathering of young people and one of our Ministers commented that you can tell where your heart is by the money you spend – in his previous District half of the money went on this, sacrifice is needed and tailoring of worship services.

We confirmed our representatives to Methodist Conference 2024 (no election was necessary).

The Synod Secretary explained that all Synod Members should have received a communication with a reasoned statement for Revd Helen Hollands to be nominated to Synod and Conference to become our **new District Chair** from 1 September 2024. Synod needed to vote on whether it was in favour of Helen’s name going to Conference.

The vote was overwhelmingly carried. Julian prayed for Revd Helen and her husband Roy (our new District Property Secretary).

A Methodist Heritage Centre in Wighton Methodist Church (which had closed for worship) was opened in early summer and Revd Jacqui Horton had put together a presentation of captioned photographs. The Centre has had 250 visitors and the season ends at the end of October.

Rev Julian Pursehouse welcomed Synod back after lunch and we took an offering during the gathering hymn. The £387.22 will be split between the Fund for Human Need and Action for Children.

Chris Finbow gave an update on our conversations with the **Beds, Essex and Herts (BEH) District**. He said people are probably aware there have been some changes in Districts across the Connexion but not here yet. We benefit from good relations with BEH and have regular meetings where we started by looking at our similarities and differences and areas where we could work differently or jointly. We have new people in post in three areas and can learn together. BEH has some Circuits with paid Finance Officers and we may like to explore this. We are both part of the South-East quadrant of the Learning Network, have the same EDI challenges and there may be opportunity for collaboration. The possibility of joint Zoom bible studies has been mentioned. BEH has their 3Generate Ambassador combined with their District Discipleship Enabler.

Julian referred to the reports from the **District Committees** which Synod Members had hopefully read and become familiar with the work going on. There was a final report from Roger Pauley, our outgoing District Property Secretary. Revd Andrew King paid tribute to Roger – his technical knowledge, doing things right and asking where the mission is in each project. Over 14 years Roger has had his own style of delivering reports. We thanked Roger (and Dulcie in her absence) and presented a photo collage to him. There will be a meal and more formal presentation later. Roger responded that it had been a pleasure to serve us all and our Lord and wished good luck to his successor Roy. Julian added his personal thanks and said few appreciate just how much work Roger has done.

Yasmin gave a brief update on **New Places for New People** (NPNP) – we are still in the collecting ideas and discernment phase and any ideas need to be with her by Christmas.

Yasmin also gave a **Pray 2-3** update. This will be ending with a Christmas prayer. The online monthly prayer meetings may carry on. Jenna Thorne will be running an online prayer course with Revd Jonny Bell on Thursday evenings starting on 26 October and exploring the messiness of prayer. Some 24/7 prayer rooms have been held. Yasmin had at least 250 Christmas prayer cards for each Circuit (some of the larger ones may have 2 bundles) and some Christmas prayer banners for each Circuit. She also has social media graphics and a little video to go with the postcards (which we watched).

Susan Eldridge (District EDI Officer) thanked the 11 Circuits that had returned their **EDI training forms** and the one other that had engaged with the subject. We have a mixed picture across the District regarding the EDI training completed/outstanding with some Circuits ahead of others. Susan advertised an in person training offer in late October from Revd Jacquie Evans who used to be a Circuit Superintendent in our District. It would require Circuits to offer to host it and do some photocopying and there may be a Zoom option as well.

Sam Parfitt shared an **EDI testimony** about the positive and less positive aspects of attending Methodist Conference in a wheelchair. One person had referred to wheelchairs to contend with and another told her she needed reversing bleepers. Another of our representatives soon stood up for Sam. Otherwise people were very good.

Rev Mary Sachikonye gave an update on the partnership with **Harare**. Some Circuits have been partnered but there is still a list of Zimbabwe Circuits that would like to be partnered with one of our Circuits. We have a lot to learn from those on the other side of the world.

Rev Andrew King read out a warning from our **Data Protection Officer**, Lorna Burroughes, about the use of photos on the internet and in magazines. Andrew mentioned we had recently had to pay a small fine in relation to a couple of photos in an old copy of Grapevine.

The Synod Secretary gave a brief update about the directory, what was in the Circuit boxes and shared a Cliff College advert. Jenna Thorne (Learning Network) gave an update regarding the Connexional Community of Practice for **Circuit Stewards**, the 6 week Zoom training for them and the option of online self-led training on MCBX.

There was a **Good News** slot including Revd Richman Ncube acknowledging the support he had received here on his journey to being in Full Connexion, with Revd Robert Roberts, Sheila Johnson and Dave Friswell all getting a mention. Revd Charity Nzegwu thanked her colleagues for their support over the last 8 months when she has not been very well and was also pleased to say her daughter had just graduated. Revd Andy Burrows said that he was thrilled the Sunday School team at Haverhill need extra resources to support the 50 who attend. Sue Groome advertised financial support for any ladies wishing to attend the National MWiB Conference at Swanwick for the first time.

Aileen Fox gave the vote of thanks. It had been a wonderful day and a wonderful Synod. She thanked the host Circuit and the team supporting them. We gave special thanks to Revd Mike Bossingham for supplying and running the technology.

The closing worship was led by Revd Martin Keenan and he also referred to the good news of Southwold Methodist Church having held 4 healing services and 3 baptisms in the sea.

**Susan Eldridge, Synod Secretary**