**Synod Highlights**

The Representative Synod of the East Anglia District met at Downham Market Methodist Church, hosted by the West Norfolk Circuit. It was largely in person but some people joined by Zoom. The theme of Synod was “**World Church**”. As it took place during the period of national mourning, we started with a moment of silence and prayers to honour our late Queen.

The opening worship was led by the West Norfolk Circuit and also included a moving tribute to the Queen and her faith. There was a focus on rainbows – we are rainbow people of God’s creation. We welcomed those Ministers who are new to our District or in one case returning to us.

It was agreed to send letters to various people.

Earlier this year we launched a Partnership with the West Harare District, Zimbabwe, and we had hoped to have visitors from there at Synod but this did not prove possible and the visit eventually took place in November. We heard some testimonies of the benefits of **relationships with overseas churches**. We have a lot to learn from elsewhere, for example from growing churches in India. We watched a video update from Deacon Angleena Keizer, Mission Partner at the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, who previously served in our District. Angleena is working with a lot of different groups and there are volunteer opportunities for all ages. She encouraged us to “Come and see, go and tell”.

Synod broke into buzz groups to share their World Church links and experiences and post-its were placed on a large map of the World. The World Church Action Team (WCAT) is looking to rebrand and for new members.

We watched the video of highlights from this year’s **Methodist Conference** in Telford. Our Pioneer Rural Church Planter, Sam Parfitt, gave a very interesting account of how she had found Conference as a first-time representative. Sam explained the basic format of the Conference, the induction of the President and Vice President and reception into full Connexion, the format of the Conference business sessions, speaking at Conference as a first time speaker and the decisions taken that reflect the work of the church and encouraged people to take part if they had the opportunity.

Rev Jo Jacobs explained the new **candidating process** to us. She explained the changes taking place from May/June 2023. The scheme approved at Conference 2022 is intended to be more inclusive for people considering candidating. There are three stages to the new candidating process:

* **Exploration** - which takes place from September to May, where you will work with an accompanist and others undergoing vocational exploration.
* **Pre-candidating** - this stage runs from June to August and to embark on this stage the person will have determined a clear call to some form of ministry. This stage includes further meetings and discussion with the accompanist and attendance at a three day retreat.
* **Candidating** - this stage runs from December to March and is the formal candidating process during which a portfolio is produced and part way through the process the candidate is required to attend a 48 hour Connexional Candidates Selection Committee. Full details of all of this process are on the Methodist Church website.

We voted on the **Special Resolution**. It was explained to Synod that in the light of the 2022 Conference Special Resolution 44/7 regarding the proposed formation of a Connexional Council all District Synods are required to vote on the proposals. This is necessary as the proposed changes would involve alterations to both standing orders and the Deed of Union.

These changes would be brought as a whole to the 2023 Conference with the intention of the new arrangements taking effect from the 1st September 2024. The wording of the Special Resolution had been circulated to all members of Synod prior to the Synod. Discussion took place and prior to the vote being taken Rev Julian Pursehouse led Synod in a time of prayer. The vote was then taken and the results were 61 in favour and 46 against.

We confirmed our representatives to Methodist Conference 2023 (no election was necessary).

**Testimony** - Rev Richman Ncube, who has been in the District for two years, talked of his journey into ministry at an early age and his family life in Zimbabwe and how his family are experiencing life in this country where he is now ministering. Richie said he is blessed to be part of British Methodism and is settling here and combining the two cultures. Richie is now exploring becoming a Minister in full Connexion.

Revs Robert Roberts and Debbie Caulk (West Norfolk/Fens Circuit) gave Synod a flavour of **Methodism in the USA**, starting from the Christmas Conference of 1784 which was set up to “Minister to people called Methodists in the United States”. This included a brief history of the United Methodist Church including the symbols and robes which play a significant part in worship. Rev Roberts went on to explain that whilst there are several significant differences between the United Methodist and The Methodist Church in Britain fundamentally both Churches have the same mission, but we sing better!

Rev Julian Pursehouse welcomed Synod back after lunch including a prayer for Rev Brian Beck who had been taken into hospital that day. We sang a World Church song (Halle, Halle, Halle) led by Deacon Donna Ely.

Rev Julian Pursehouse explained to Synod about the **Oversight and Trusteeship Report** which was presented to the 2022 Conference. This was a wide ranging and far reaching report which ultimately was aimed at making changes to structures which hopefully would reduce some of the burden placed on Districts, Circuits and Local Churches. It was explained to Synod that Conference had spent a considerable amount of time discussing the proposals and in summary Conference agreed to reduce the size and length of the Conference from 2024 and to replace the current Methodist Council and the Strategy & Resources Committee with a new Connexional Council made up of around 20 Members, both lay and ordained.

The Conference declined the proposals aimed at the reduction in the number of Districts and as a result of this decision the resolutions on this matter were withdrawn. Rev Pursehouse explained that as a result of Conference not agreeing to these proposals, over the Summer further online discussions took place with Conference representatives with a view to the Connexion discerning District views on possible ways ahead. It was reported that our own District Conference Representatives had taken part in these further discussions and thoughts had also been submitted by the District Policy Committee. Rev Pursehouse assured Synod that further discussions and prayerful discernment would be taking place over the coming months.

Jane Gay (District Safeguarding Officer) expressed thanks to the various trainers around the District who have led foundation and advanced level courses both online and face to face. She reminded people of the need to ensure all church office holders undertake the relevant **Safeguarding** training. Jane also encouraged churches to make use of the “Reflect & Respond” resources which originally came out when many churches were closed due to lockdown and therefore in many cases have not been shared with churches. Synod was also encouraged to look at the two connexionally produced webinars focusing on working with survivors of abuse. Recently new resources have come out from Connexion focusing on domestic abuse. Copies of all these resources were distributed to Circuits at this Synod.

Reports from **District Committees** were received as written. In addition to these reports, Rev Sharon Thraves informed Synod of the upcoming Zoom meeting about encouraging evangelism in local churches.

In the absence of the District Mission Enabler, Dr Yasmin Finch, Julian introduced the

**Pray 2-3** District prayer initiative that is being planned. All members of Synod were given a postcard highlighting some of the points which hopefully Circuits and local Churches will want to explore further. Synod then watched a video that Yasmin had produced which explained in more detail some of the ideas and suggestions.

Dave Friswell updated Synod on the developments which are taking place in our District in relation to **NPNP (New Places for New People)**. It is hoped that two or three main projects will be in place in the next year to 18 months. A team of people from across the District has been set up to help develop these projects and to encourage Circuits and Churches to get involved in new initiatives.

The Synod Secretary informed Synod of the developments taking place in the District on **JDS/EDI**. Thanks were expressed to those people who had already expressed a willingness to be part of the District EDI Group, although additional volunteers would be welcome. It was explained that in due course mandatory EDI training would need to be undertaken by a range of church officers including ministers, local preachers, worship leaders and church stewards.

Copies of the Grapevine magazine were distributed from Synod to Circuits and local Churches. The Synod Secretary encouraged people to consider writing articles for the next addition of Grapevine. Compilation of the District Directory has not been straightforward this year due to the delay in receiving some people’s GDPR permissions.

The **MHA Video** was watched by Synod, providing people with an update of the work being carried out around the country by MHA.

**Good News** from around the District was shared. It was reported from the Norfolk Broads Circuit that two Baptisms had recently taken place with over 50 people in the Congregation at each service and that at the services Baptingles (a variation on Christingles) were used and the idea was very well received. If other churches want to know more about Baptingles please speak to Coleen Palmer.

The Norwich Circuit reported that one of their current Mission initiatives is to provide 500 chairs and tables for a school in the Harare District of Zimbabwe. To date funds have been raised to purchase 200 chairs and 200 tables and it is hoped that the remaining 300 chairs and tables can be purchased as soon as possible, but as with all such things the cost of these has risen considerably over the last few months.

St Ives Methodist Church have recently started an initiative to provide a soup and a roll lunch but this is now developing into providing two course lunches and a warm space for anyone who wishes to attend.

Rev Catherine Dixon expressed thanks to the West Norfolk Circuit for their welcome and hospitality. Thanks were also expressed to all who had contributed to the Synod.

Before moving into the closing worship Synod was reminded about the retiring collection which was being split between the Methodist Ministers Children’s Relief Association and the “All We Can” Pakistan appeal for those impacted by the devastating floods.

The closing worship was led by Rev Julian Pursehouse, remembering the good (the Queen) and the evil (there had been 400 recent deaths in Ukraine).

**Susan Eldridge and Chris Finbow**