**Highlights of the East Anglia District Spring Synod 2025**

The representative synod of the East Anglia District met at Chapel Field Road Church, Norwich on 26th April 2025 with the theme “Moving Forward”.

**Welcome** -Chair of the District, the Rev Helen Hollands, welcomed everyone to synod both those attending in person and on zoom and thanked all those who had prepared synod and the District Staff who were leading workshops during the latter part of the morning session. Rev Mary Sachikonye, Acting Superintendent of the Norwich Circuit, welcomed everyone to “the fine city” of Norwich.

**Opening worship** - was led by Rev Anne Richardson and members of the Sign of the Cross Deaf church who conducted worship in British Sign Language and spoken English, teaching us to sign “Praise the Lord” before we sang, and signed, that great hymn “To God be the Glory”. Rev Anne highlighted some of the problems faced by those with hearing loss and reminded us that deaf people are the same as us and enjoy worshipping together as Deaf Church.

Rev Helen thanked those who had taken part in leading the worship and especially Anne, wishing her well for her move to Gurnsey where she has been stationed from September there was recognition from many that our loss would be Guernsey’s gain!

**Greetings** -A number of cards of greeting from the synod were agreed, some had been sent and the rest will be sent during the next few days.

**Reports** - Several reports had been circulated to members prior to synod and, following an opportunity to ask questions, these were all received.

**Accounts** - The District Treasurer, Shaun Cushion, formally presented the audited accounts for 2023-4 which were agreed and then presented the proposed budget. The budget did allow for a drawdown of funds from the District Advance Fund and Shaun advised that a Financial Strategy Team will be set up in the next few months to examine the finances and ensure that the District doesn’t run out of money! The budget proposal was accepted and Shaun thanked for all the work he put into the financial workings of the District.

**Vacancies** - There were a number of vacancies for District Officers which had been filled since the last synod and Rev Helen thanked all those who had volunteered, offered or agreed to take up office – there were still some vacancies and if anyone had an interest in and willingness to take on roles they should speak to Helen to find out more.

**Memorials to conference** - There were no memorials to conference.

**Stationing** – Rev Helen reported that the District would have all 7 vacant positions filled in September which was amazing, some ministers from the UK church and others from overseas. Helen explained that there are proposals going to conference in June to alter and streamline the stationing process so we await conference’s decision on these.

Helen expressed the delight of the District that Rev Judith Bell would be going forward for ordination at the Conference this year and asked the synod to support Judith, who is moving from the Norfolk Broads Circuit to West Norfolk Circuit in September, by attending her testimony service which will be held at Magdalen Way Church, Gorleston on 15th June at 3pm.

**Working with Beds, Essex and Herts** - Chris Finbow, Synod Secretary, advised synod of the meetings that had been taking place with representatives of the Beds, Essex and Herts District. Both districts felt that we need to keep aware of various Connexional changes to District re-structuring as they take place. A joint meeting of the Superintendent Ministers of both Districts took place in November and it was felt that this it is good to work together in this way and other joint meetings may be arranged, but there was very little support for a merger of the two districts.

**NPNP (New Places for New People)** – Dr Yasmin Finch, District Mission Enabler, presented a video to the synod outlining the 3 projects that have been approved to date, namely Upwell Garden Church, Wavestation at Mundesley and The Hive in Central Norfolk. These projects are very diverse in nature but all are attracting interest. There will be some exciting job vacancies advertised for the projects over the next few months so look out for the adverts on the District Website. NPNP funding is available from connexion and there will be more funding available so if you have any ideas speak to Yasmin. East Anglia was not the first to bring NPNP projects on board but we are now ahead of many Districts in the Connexion. Helen thanked Yasmin and those working with her on their achievements.

After a short comfort break synod broke into 3 groups for workshops

**Workshops** – Dr Yasmin Finch led a workshop on AI and Andrew Tate – How do we speak about faith in 2025

Mr Roy Hollands, District Property Secretary, led a workshop on Property

Mr Neil van Holland, District Safeguarding Officer, and Jenna Thorne, from the Learning Network led a workshop on Trauma Informed Practice

Apart from those who were on zoom and had, of necessity, to attend the first workshop those attending were able to select which workshop they attended although it was recommended that circuits tried to get their reps to cover a variety rather than staying together so that discussion on all the topics could be shared later.

**Afternoon Session**

Following a break for lunch synod reconvened with a hymn during which a collection, to be split between the District Benevolent Fund and the Harare West Project was taken.

Dr Yasmin Finch showed a video about the Soul Collage retreat days that are taking place in July and encouraged people to take up the remaining places.

**News from various circuits** - West Norfolk Circuit Steward, Lesley Dent, outlined how easy it could be to achieve an Eco Friendly Status for your church, many in the circuit had found they qualified for a bronze with very little extra effort and Lesley encouraged churches to complete the survey on the website as it will tell you immediately how well you are doing. Rev Paul Critchley emphasised that the West Norfolk Circuit is made up of rural, coastal and town areas and it is important to be a part of the community you are in. He encouraged churches to get involved in Park Runs if there is one in their locality – you don’t have to run, you can walk or just volunteer to steward – it all helps build relationships. Paul was able to staff a Christmas lunch mainly using contacts he had made through the Park Run. It is also important to build links with local councils and look at planning applications.

Rev Jonny Bell from Central Norfolk Circuit reminded us all to be aware of the erosion of rights for some groups, especially our trans siblings, we need to stand up for justice. He then went on to highlight the development that is proposed for Holt church, showing pictures of the building as it was, is and hopes to be so that it will be a building more adaptable and suitable for the needs of the community in the future.

Cambridge Circuit advised synod of how working and sharing had been fostered between 2 churches, Castle Street and Histon, during lockdown and these had continued when zoom worship was shared. Once restrictions were lifted relationships deepened which included taking a group to 3 Generate and also a residential weekend at Sizewell Hall in Suffolk which included retreat, craft, reflection, good food and a lot of laughter!

**The District Youth Strategy** - has been adopted by the District and includes creating chances for young people, creating spaces for the voices of young people to be heard, budgets for youth work and encourages each circuit to consider their young people, making space on agendas to discuss young people’s provision, encouraging attendance at 3 generate, for which District funding is available, and encouraging young people within the District to serve as Youth Ambassadors to their peers. Job descriptions have been written for the youth Ambassador roles and recruitment will be started soon. Rev Nick Witham asked all to especially hold the work in prayer and reminded synod that young people are the emerging spiritual growth generation and growing numbers are reading the Bible, are open to Christianity and attending church so they need to be encouraged. District funding is available for anyone who wants to attend the Cliff College training for young people’s work. Helen thanked Nick and the team for the work they had been doing and said it was wonderful that the survey of youth work within the District had revealed work that had not been recognised before.

**Information sharing** – Chris Finbow reminded synod members that their circuit boxes needed to be emptied as they included the Spring edition of the District Newsletter, Grapevine, to be circulated, plus other information which should please be shared with all the churches in the circuit.

**Synod Soapbox** – Dr Wendy Allen, District Local Preacher Tutor, outlined her role to encourage new local preachers and worship leaders, and find new mentors to assist the new recruits. The current training package is available but if people are finding it daunting Wendy is willing to help try to unlock the course to them.

Rev Jonny Bell, District EDI Champion, advised that an EDI newsletter is being produced aiming to make EDI material and learning more accessible. This will be put on the EDI page of the District website where there is also access to the Guide to Inclusive Language which has been produced by the connexion and lots of other useful information.

Celia Summerfield, District LP secretary, has organised a District Day at Diss Methodist Church please contact her if you would like to attend.

Ros Peedle, Lay Pastor at Lessingham in the North Norfolk Circuit, told synod of a telephone service run for elderly people and the carers lanyard that is available within the Norfolk and Waveney area which may help carers to get the respect they deserve.

Teresa Ely, from the Ely and Newmarket Circuit, told synod of the inspirational time they had when the LAMPS Theatre Group presented “The Passion” and recommended the company to other synod members.

Synod were advised of a Threads from the Bible exhibition which will be taking place in Ely Cathedral 9th May to 29th June and tickets are available from the cathedral website.

Rev David McAloon, District Rural Officer, asked synod members to send him information, problems and queries which are issues in rural areas so that he could establish a forum where people could share and help each other.

Susan Eldridge, District MWIB President (Designate), invited synod to take a look at the stall which was set up in another room at the church.

Rev Moses John, delighted synod by telling members of his strong calling to be stationed in Haverhill. The church now has a full church for worship with standing room only and lots of young people coming in. They are starting 40 days of prayer from 30th April and invited synod members to pray for them.

**Vote of thanks** - Rev Paul Critchley thanked everyone involved with synod, especially Chapel Field Road church and the Norwich Circuit, saying that a mark of a good church was its hospitality and it had certainly been good, even the weather had been just right and it had been an engaging synod.

Rev Helen thanked all those presbyters who were leaving the District for all they had shared and contributed to the life and work of the district and wished them well for the future.

**Closing worship** – this was led by the Norwich Circuit staff based on the reading of the story of the Emmaus Road experience from Luke 24, challenging all present to return to their churches with hearts burning and eyes open to do Christ’s work.

**Next synod** – this will be on 20th September 2025 the venue will be advised in due course.