**Synod Highlights**

Our Chair of District, Rev Julian Pursehouse, welcomed everyone to the first East Anglia Hybrid Synod. The theme for the Synod was “**Love God - Love God’s World**”. We had great support with the technology from the Norwich Circuit who also hosted those present in person at Chapel Field Road Methodist Church.

The opening Worship was led by Rev Anne Richardson and Norwich Deaf Church Members.

A Bible was placed at the front of the Church with responses, then a cross and a candle were brought forward, then “Be still for the presence of the Lord” was sung and signed. This was followed by responsive prayer being said and signed, as was the Lord’s Prayer. The Bible reading was Ephesians 5: 1-2, 8-9 and was followed by prayers for Synod and for those not with us. This was followed with a moment of silence to remember those who had gone to glory since we last met in person. We were reminded that light is very important as we leave worship for the business of the day, but we know God is with us walking in his light. Our time of worship was concluded with the singing and signing of “The Spirit lives to set us free” followed by the Grace. Spontaneous applause took place and thanks were expressed by Rev Julian to Rev Anne and the members of the Deaf Church.

It was agreed to send letters to various people, including President Designate Rev Graham Thompson, our former Chair of District.

We had a focus on **Eco-Church**. We watched Dr Yasmin Finch’s video on this topic and Julian made Synod members aware of the information in the Synod mailing about the subject, including the Environmental Policy and Action Plan for the District. This was followed by an update from Connexion via a video from Mollie Pugmire (CJ4A). Julian introduced a time to respond on these thoughts that had been brought to us by video.

Stella Davis shared experiences from the Stowmarket area including that we don’t want to be in the position of saying “if you knew, why didn’t you do something about it?” She shared her frustration with Members of Parliament who don’t respond. Stella explained that they wanted to be doing something at ground level so they started a Facebook group which is growing with a collective voice and shared skills, an example of start small and work together.

She said that as a Christian in a secular group it has been an interesting experience, and she became aware that local churches are often late to respond to the party. It was noted there are initiatives happening around the District, for example Ipswich Circuit has a very informative website.

After showing the Connexionally produced video of this year’s **Methodist Conference**, Rev Catherine Dixon and Rev Charity Nzegwu explained how Conference this year was somewhat different due to it taking place in hybrid form, with the majority of representatives attending by Zoom. They shared some of the main areas of discussion which took place including Worship & Online Communion (resources for churches to use will be available in the near future), the Theology of Safeguarding, Marriage & Relationships (including the vote taken on the “God in Love Unites Us” resolutions), Justice, Dignity & Solidarity, moving towards a fully inclusive church, Changing patterns of Ministry and issues around the request for voluntary contributions to the ministerial pension fund reserve (explained by Ros Peedle).

The reply from Conference to the Memorial sent by the East Anglia District was reported and it was explained that whilst the Memorial was declined, several of the points in it had been noted. Members of Synod were encouraged to read the Conference Digest (copy sent out with the Synod papers) which included more details of the business covered by Conference.

Ben Orton, **District 3Generate Ambassador**, spoke about some of the work he has been doing within the District encouraging young people to be involved in their local churches. He explained that 3Generate this year was taking place in October at the NEC in Birmingham and that there were still places available if young people wanted to attend. The 3Generate video was shown which explained in more detail the format of the weekend and also how the practicalities e.g. indoor camping, workshops and meals were being organised at 3Generate.

We had an update on the **West Harare, Zimbabwe Partnership** led by Deacon Donna Ely and Rev Mary Sachikonye. Deacon Donna explained that the World Action Team meet three times a year and their main aim is to encourage partnership with World Church and Donna and Mary explained how the team had been reflecting what the two communities can learn together and from each other. The church in West Harare had expressed their happiness with the developing links and how they appreciated talking of God and sharing with us here and learning and sharing together. At the most recent meeting via Zoom both sides shared hope for the partnership and a series of slides were shown which illustrated this further. Synod were asked to continue to pray for the partnership and its work. Julian thanked both Donna and Mary for all their work in developing this link.

Before breaking for lunch, the “All We Can” video was shown and mention made of the retiring collection for Tearfund. Those on Zoom were invited to donate individually to Tearfund or All We Can.

Our representatives to **Methodist Conference 2022** were elected. Rev Jackie Goddard, Rev Paul Critchley and Mrs Samantha Parfitt join those who still have part of their term to serve.

Reports from **District Committees** had been sent out in advance. Jane Gay, District Safeguarding Officer, expressed thanks for all people do in local churches and circuits. She reminded people of the report circulated which needs to go up in churches with the Safeguarding posters for Churches. Further copies are available if needed. A large amount of training has been done (mostly online) over the past few months. The District Safeguarding Conference takes place on Saturday 16th October 2021. The two Keynote Speakers are Rev Dr Nicola Price Tebbutt (the Theology of Safeguarding and Forgiveness) and Tim Carter giving an update on safeguarding from a Connexional perspective and also giving an update on the outcomes of the IICSA Report.

Rev Dr Jane Leach shared with us that Wesley House is 100 years old and showed us some of the memorabilia that was available. There are events happening throughout the year which can be registered for online. Rev Joan Pell reported on the Ipswich Circuit’s focus on Climate Action and that the Circuit website contains lots of information on this focusing on the 9 weeks leading up to COP 26.

An update on the “**God for All**” strategy was led by Abi Jarvis, Discipleship and Faith Formation Officer in the Connexional Evangelism & Growth Team. Abi explained that she was part of a team working for a growing and inclusive church, taking steps together to encourage new disciples. She is aware of how hard people work in local churches and expressed grateful thanks to them. Abi explained a little bit about herself and her links with this part of the country, having been born in Bedford with a Methodist mum and a Baptist Minister father. Abi has been involved in her current role for just over a year and initially did not envisage herself doing many of the exciting things that she has become involved in.

Abi posed two questions to the Synod:

* “How are you and your community feeling right now?”
* “If someone saw on your business card “Teller of the Good News” how would you respond to that?”

She then went on to explain her involvement in the **Methodist Way of Life** and the four areas of our calling which it covers namely Worship, Evangelism, Learning and Caring and Service. She explained that these formed a potential framework for interpreting the Gospel and in the light of this posed two further questions:

* Are we neglecting some of these areas more than others?
* Thinking about the four areas, what are you and your church longing for right now?”

Abi concluded by inviting churches and individuals to take some space and think of one commitment they could make. Further information and ideas are available on the Evangelism and Growth page of the Methodist website. An opportunity was given to members of Synod to ask Abi questions or make comments on what she had said, and several members of Synod did so.

Thanks were expressed to Synod Officers for facilitating Synod by Zoom, as well as in person, and it was hoped by some that this will continue. A further comment was made that making use of Zoom is not only positive from an ecological point of view but also in possibly allowing more people to attend.

Rev James Bamber expressed thanks to the host Circuit for their welcome and hospitality. Events like this don’t just happen but take an awful lot of work, for which everyone is grateful.

Closing Worship was led by the Rev Andy Burrows, Superintendent, Norwich Circuit based on John 6 vv 47 – 69 The Living Bread which included a video - “Will you come and meet a man?”

**Susan Eldridge** **and Chris Finbow**