**Synod Highlights**

Synod met at Bramford Road Methodist Church, Ipswich. This church is unusual in that it has an outside pulpit, although we did not use it for Synod! This was our second hybrid Synod, with a split of roughly 60% in person and 40% on Zoom. We are grateful to the Ipswich Circuit for hosting and providing the IT support.

Our opening worship was led by the Ipswich Circuit. Revd Joan Pell preached on the well-known reading from Micah (Chapter 6, verses 6-8). Our theme for Synod was “**Justice and God for All**” and Revd Joan told us about the church’s work with the homeless in the part of America from which she comes. This included “The gathering inn” from which small beginnings led to providing a way out of homeless. She reminded us that young people care about justice and are excited by a justice-seeking church. So “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God”. We prayed for all experiencing injustice today.

It was agreed to send letters to various people.

Rachel Lampard was unable to be with us but had responded to our invitation by providing a video where she talked about the “Walking with Micah” project and challenged us in small groups to imagine a fair, more equal and life-bringing world and to describe what this might look or feel like. Then to consider the most important issue that needs addressing to get there and one key action needed to address it. Lively conversation followed and feedback was captured as requested by Rachel.

Our next session was planned to be led by Revd Matt Finch on “God for All” (new places for new people and church at the margins). All the advance preparation had been done and some videos included so, when Revd Matt was taken ill at the last minute, one of the Ipswich Ministers, Revd Andrew Sankey, stepped into the breach. We heard about church at the margins work in Gorleston (including rainbows painted on railings), work (listening to God and the movement of the Spirit) at “The Hive” in Central Norfolk and “bite-sized” online church in the Ipswich Circuit. Statistics about the level of poverty in the UK, especially children living in poverty (4.3m), were hard to listen to. There was a period for conversation and a split between those who were inspired and others feeling too consumed by their existing duties. People were encouraged to look at the various Connexionally produced resources which give further information about “God for All” and “New Places for New People”.

Revd Debbie Caulk was confirmed as our representative to Methodist Council from September 2022, replacing Revd Alison Walker who is moving out of the District. Revd Mary Sachikonye and Revd Debbie Caulk gave an update from the recent launch of our District partnership with Harare, Zimbabwe, where we hope to learn from each other. Leaflets were available in the Circuit boxes giving more information and also Harare Link Prayer Card Bookmarks (since circulated electronically).

We watched a short MHA video before breaking for lunch and after lunch carried out the normal business of Synod including agreeing appointments (including Rev Dr Richman Ncube as District Training Fund Officer and Revd Mary Sachikonye as Presbyteral Synod Secretary) and the accounts.

We had an update from our District Chair, Revd Julian Pursehouse, regarding the regional conversations taking place and there was an opportunity to ask questions. This is expected to feature more in our Autumn Synod.

Revd Julian asked Synod members for any immediate thoughts. Responses included:

* If areas of mission are being considered, should they be the current Districts and Regions or should we look at new areas? What part should “areas of population” play?
* Is geography the right way or are we in danger of just doing the same as always?
* Careful thought needs to be given to the relevance of Circuits to Districts.
* The naming of any new Districts/Regions is important in order to maintain identity.
* If not broke don’t fix it!
* With larger areas it will be important that the role of Chair continues to be seen as very much pastoral as well as administrative as is currently the case.
* Do we need Districts or could we exist as Circuits and Conference?
* There is a danger with the proposed model that there will be fewer opportunities for grassroots involvement in the decision making of the Methodist Church.
* What are the financial implications?
* It is essential that any decisions made are suitable for the church of today.
* Where does our existing relationship with the Beds, Essex and Herts District fit in?

Revd Julian thanked Synod for their comments and gave an assurance that the thoughts expressed would be noted, emphasising that the whole restructuring process was still a work in progress.

We listened to an excerpt from a podcast of Revd Charity Nzegwu talking about the JDS/EDI Strategy and had a brief update around this. It was emphasised that we all need to commit to learning more about the issues of JDS/EDI, to care for each other and we also need to learn from society. It was explained that the ultimate goal of JDS is to ensure a fully inclusive Methodist Church. Synod was reminded that Conference has agreed that EDI should be an item on every church meeting agenda. Various resources have been produced to help local churches, many of which are on the Methodist Church website. Synod was reminded that our District is currently looking for a new EDI Officer (probably supported by a group of people) and it is hoped this vacancy can be filled as soon as possible. After Synod an electronic guide containing further information was widely circulated.

There was a brief safeguarding update by our District Safeguarding Officer, Jane Gay, who reminded us of the monthly Safeguarding Newsletter she sends out and some information sharing (covering Grapevine, 3Generate, the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Celebrations and an invitation for applications for the role of District Agricultural Chaplain.

There was information about the visit of the President and Vice President of Conference in May and a good news slot including that St Ives Methodist Church had welcomed 12 new families. Farewells were said to those moving on and a vote of thanks given to all who helped with Synod. Revd Peter Goodhall, a Deputy Chair of District, led the closing worship and dedicated the collection for Ukraine which had been made during Synod.

The next Synod is planned for 17 September 2022 at Downham Market Methodist Church.

**Susan Eldridge and Chris Finbow**