**Synod highlights**

The Representative Synod of the East Anglia District met at Chapel Field Road Methodist Church, Norwich, hosted by the Norwich Circuit. This Synod was mainly in person but we did have about 15 members on Zoom. We are grateful to the Norwich Circuit for hosting and providing the IT support. We were delighted that this Synod coincided with the Presidential visit to the District and it was wonderful to welcome back to Synod our former District Chair, Revd Graham Thompson, who is now residing in our District. There were a few more guests than usual as people were keen to catch up with Graham and his wife Alison. Our theme for Synod was “**Pray 2-3 and mission**”.

Our opening worship was led by the President of Conference. Revd Graham preached on Philippians 2:11. He shared a little about his and Alison’s visit to Belize and Guyana in the pre-Presidential year. Methodism there is not particularly strong but they hit above their weight and sing the old hymns of 40 years ago! The visit was escorted by a Bishop and took place over Easter 2022. There were a lot of services of at least two hours with all age groups and a lot of coming and going! In Belize the Mayan people had been there for over 3,000 years before being attacked by Spanish invaders. They repelled them but decided they needed to leave before the invaders returned so their people would have a future – a huge sacrifice. Graham linked this to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. There is a sense of unity in both Belize and Guyana. Despite the difficult history, groups live in peace. There are times when sacrifices need to be made for the sake of unity.

It was agreed to send letters to various people. Reports from District Committees were received as written. These provide a whole spectrum of information. Shaun Cushion, our District Treasurer, talked a little about the audited accounts which were agreed by Synod and will be uploaded to the Charity website. In Budget terms we are facing the perfect storm but the District is maintaining the budget for Circuits at the existing level by taking money from the District Advance Fund.

An update was given regarding the appointments list that had been sent to Synod members including the appointment of our new District Safeguarding Officer (DSO). A presentation was made to our outgoing DSO, Jane Gay, later in the Synod with grateful thanks for all she has done. Jane encouraged us all to read “the theology of Safeguarding”. We have just appointed our new District Lay Employment Secretary, subject to references and DBS check, and will be interviewing for a paid part-time District Property Secretary in May. Other vacancies are being reflected upon. It was commented that we do not appear to have an eco-church lead. This is actually held by the Service Group Co-ordinator who is stepping down and a replacement is being sought.

There was a proposed **Memorial to Conference** presented by Revd Robert Roberts (originating from one of his churches) suggesting that the length of the Presidency be extended to 5 years. This led to a lively debate which included concern as to what it would mean for the Vice-Presidency, other denominations have a well-known leader but are still in decline, the suggestion that the Presidency, being a single year, only allows a President to briefly engage with projects, and therefore does not enable the importance of joining in God’s work and that it would not help churches grow at grass roots level.

It was pointed out that the President has a year of preparation then the year itself and then a year as Past President so it does cover three years. There was a suggestion that the Secretary of Conference (SOC)’s role could be strengthened but our District Chair said the Methodist Church is hesitant at doing this – the SOC is the servant of the Methodist Conference. It was acknowledged that it is good that a local church can bring things to Synod. The vote was taken and 11 were in favour, 76 against and 7 abstained so the Memorial was lost.

Our District Mission Enabler, Dr Yasmin Finch, explained to Synod about the **small grants fund** that has been set up which churches can apply to for up to £1,000 (total applications up to £10,000 per annum) through a simple process. Yasmin is leading our “**Pray 2-3**” initiative for the calendar year 2023. We watched a Pray 2-3 video. The initiative was launched in January and there are pick and mix options on the dedicated website.

Options include prayer walking, a creative prayer workshop and a monthly prayer Zoom. Synod members were each given two “Praying for you” postcards and invited to write a generic prayer for a Synod member on one of them (these were gathered up and redistributed) and a prayer for someone not at Synod on the other to send later. Some brief testimonies about prayer were shared, including encouraging prayer trees to be used, the growth of a Zoom prayer meeting and being overwhelmed by the gift of prayer at a time of bereavement.

Our District Chair gave a brief regional working update. A small group of office holders from **East Anglia** (EA) and **Beds, Essex and Herts** (BEH) Districts are now meeting on a regular basis to discuss the possibility of working together and sharing resources. There is no presumption as to where these conversations may lead. We have different structures to each other. We are learning from each other. The BEH District Property Secretary has kindly offered to mentor our new DPS (if required) and there may be other similar arrangements. We are not expecting to become one bigger District any time soon. Both Districts are needing to employ District Staff in order to ensure compliance.

Dr Yasmin Finch gave an update on **New Places for New People** (NPNP). We are in tranche 3 and so are in a year of reflecting. Match funding is needed from church/Circuit/District. The focus is on new churches and Christian communities. There is a guiding team managing the project and receiving one page proposals so the ideas can be on the table and a discerning process begin.

The EDI report in the Synod reports booklet was referred to. Revd Jonny Bell gave an update on the EDI training the Central Norfolk Circuit has developed to be delivered face to face or on Zoom. Revd Jacqui Horton updated Synod on a very exciting initiative to create a small Heritage Centre at **Wighton Methodist Church** (only 2 miles from the pilgrimage site of Walsingham) in a partnership between the Central Norfolk Circuit and the Methodist Historical Society (East Anglia).

After lunch we sang a hymn and took an offering for “All We Can” which raised £444.

We then handed back to the President to lead a Bible Study on “**What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?**” Graham talked a little about the context we are in – post pandemic (though not totally over yet), the trauma from having to close churches during the worst of the pandemic, “God in Love” leading to some disunity and with significant statutory and compliance requirements to meet.

Graham explained the significance of certain numbers in the Bible – 40 years means a “very long time”, 7 means perfection and 6 means imperfection. This was illustrated with passages from Revelation Chapters 1 and 2. Graham talked about the situation in Ephesus at the time this was written – a great commercial centre where Paul established the church. The passages contained commendation and then criticism. First love had been abandoned and it was necessary to remember how it was, repent and work to get it back.

Before Synod broke into discussion groups Graham gave us some questions to consider:

* What is good about our church?
* What is bad about our church?
* What do we understand by loss of first love?
* Do we think we have experienced this?
and, most importantly,
* What is the Spirit saying to us?

When we returned after some lively discussion in the groups, there was a short feedback session including that we need to consider what we need to leave behind in order to have a future, be available when duty calls and be teachable so we can be the church of the present. Graham warned about spreading ourselves too thinly and said the pandemic gave an opportunity to reset – stop and pray. We must not miss the moment as the “present” is a gift.

Copies of the Grapevine magazine were distributed from Synod to Circuits and local churches. A reminder of the date of 3Generate was given (6-8 October 2023 at the NEC, Birmingham) and the dates of the next two Synods were given (16 September 2023 at Lowestoft and 27 April 2024 at Huntingdon).

Farewells to those who will be leaving the District were said and there was a “good news” slot. Revd Sharon Thraves thanked the Norwich Circuit for their welcome and hospitality and thanked the organisers of Synod.

The short closing worship was led by Revd Steve Cullis of the Norwich Circuit and was followed by refreshments before departing.

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