**Highlights of the East Anglia District Synod**

**Held on 20th September 2025 at Thetford Methodist Church**

Synod opened with Rev Helen Hollands welcoming all those who had travelled to Thetford and those joining synod on zoom.

Rev David Ely, Superintendent Minister of the hosting Thetford, Diss and Mildenhall circuit, also welcomed everyone and went through a few housekeeping arrangements, commenting that there was evidence that John and Charles Wesley travelled through Thetford, but no evidence of them preaching in the town.

Rev Helen led us in worship, including the sacrament of Holy Communion, using the set readings for the next day, Amos 8 v4-7 and Luke 16 v 1-13. She preached on generosity, how riches can become an object of life and how money can corrupt and be used to gain power which may then influence others and lead to exploitation. God’s loving generosity extends to all, God is concerned about economic justice and we are called to give generously in our hearts, of our wealth, time and resources, particularly to those who have least. The Methodist people are known for their generosity, but perhaps should not make judgements in terms of numbers and instead of asking “How much”? should ask, “How well do we live, are we to be trusted with what we have been given, and do we use it generously and wisely?”

**Dispensations and cards of greeting** - Rev Helen said that she had given 7 dispensations to ministers unable to attend synod and received various apologies. She read a list of presbyters and people, active in the District who had died since the last synod and to whose families’ cards expressing our condolence had been sent. A card of greeting was also requested for Mr Raymond Sawyer from the Ipswich Circuit who had recently celebrated 75 years as a Local Preacher – a fact that caused a few to gasp with appreciation and amazement!

Synod Secretary, Chris Finbow, also welcomed everyone and gave some additional notices.

**Conference 2025** – the video of Conference 2025 – which can be found on the Methodist Church website - was shown and then Rev Saul Tadzaushe and Rev Paul Critchley gave their highlights from the conference at which Rev Judith Bell had been ordained and Rev Paulson Devasahayam Leela had been welcomed, by transfer, into full Connexion.

**Conference 2026** – Rev Tom Osborne and Mrs Aileen Fox were elected, there being no other nominations, to serve as synod reps for the district at the 2026 conference with Rev Helen Hollands, Rev Saul Tadzaushe, Mr Chris Finbow and Mrs Judy Read. Helen encouraged others to consider offering to serve as synod reps in future, hoping they had been encouraged by what they had heard and seen about the 2025 Conference.

**Our story** – Chair of the District, Rev Helen Hollands and Deputy Chair, Rev James Bamber led a session entitled, “Our Story”, including a video from Deacon Kerry Scarlett. They advised that a half-time FRCO, (Faith Rooted Community Organiser), will be appointed to the District through Connexional funds. The FRCO will be bringing people together and working alongside them for collective change. At the heart of this work is conversation to build bridges and travel with people, not just talking to people but by listening to them. Synod members were encouraged to chat to someone they didn’t know well using the questions, “On a sunny day, you’d find me …?” and “On a Monday morning you’d find me…?” Feedback from the conversations included that it was good to have a chance to listen to someone else’s story and to share yours. People sometimes meet together but don’t actually connect with one another. Deeper conversations may not be immediate as there needs to be trust. Conversation must work at the speed of trust, prayerfully discerning where God is leading, talking to God, others and our communities. This is not about giving already busy, tired people more to do but discerning where God wants us to be to show that we are a listening, responding, evangelistic and justice seeking church.

**Synod broke for lunch** during which there was opportunity to see the stalls.

After lunch, and the singing of a hymn, synod members were asked whether there was anyone else that members felt should be sent a card of greeting and if so to speak or email Judy Read, Assistant Synod Secretary.

**Synod reports** – these had been circulated in advance and, with the exception of a brief update on EDI, were accepted.

**NPNP**  Synod was given updates on three New Places for New People, (NPNP), projects.

**Central Norfolk - The Hive** – this Great Cressingham project is now 5 years old and has grown from an initial telling of the Christmas Story during the Covid 19 pandemic to being a thriving work. They recently received students from Cliff College on placement and also lead a, “pop up” in Blakeney for holidaymakers, local people and others from the circuit. This was a great success.

**North Norfolk - Wave Station** – the Cromer café works with the homeless and people with mental health issues. The Wave Station project is aiming to connect with beach people and explore life’s deeper questions and what it means to “be” with them. It recently included a Boxing Day Dip when brave souls went into the sea on Boxing Day and a Surf Day was held in July – unfortunately there was no surf on the day selected but everyone still had a good time and Andy Frost spoke about “Surf Church”. On 11th October Jane Green will be leading a prayer labyrinth encouraging prayer on the beach. The project is still seeking a full-time worker and this is being re-advertised so hopefully the right person will be led to apply for the role.

**Fens Circuit – Upwell Garden church** – Upwell chapel is set in acres of garden and a place of deep spirituality where people are finding God through creation. 74 people attended a Garden Party at which the “Godly Play” method of telling a Biblical Story was included. There are lots of prayer opportunities and a Pioneer Worker is being sought. The next event is a Harvest celebration of “All Creatures Great and Small”.

**Assistant NPNP worker** – Mrs Amiee van Holland has recently been appointed to this role.

**Our Song**

Rev Vivienne Smith, new Superintendent of the Ipswich Circuit, had synod members riveted as she told a story she had relayed at her welcome service about an experienced violinist sharing his talent and encouraging a young player. Their music inspired others – we will never know how many people we have blessed. We are called to inspire others through our Song.

**Eco Church** – Lesley Dent, spoke about ECO Church and encouraged churches to get involved in the scheme at a level that suits them – she explained that you don’t have to be perfect to get an award, just show that you are acting for the good of the planet so you can tailor the award to where you are as a church. As District ECO Champion, Lesley is happy to answer any questions churches may have and point them in the right direction. There are other resources on the district web-site.

**Pilgrimage** – Sarah Friswell encouraged people to be involved in pilgrimage – it is not just something for other denominations. There are several Methodist pilgrimages available around the country. Pilgrimage is a journey alongside other people. Sarah is hoping to arrange 2 or 3 pilgrimages in East Anglia in 2026 and is keen to hear from anyone who would like to join her in organising these.

**Stanton Project** – Rev Paul Mellor had prepared a video about the Byways project in Stanton, part of the Thetford, Diss and Mildenhall Circuit. A visit to a soup church in Hopton encouraged two members who attended to appear on the video and tell their story about joining the Soup Church – “it’s friendly, a religious theme is shared but people feel free to say what they want to”. The project at RAF Honnington and Stanton will be advertising for a community worker and it is hoped that someone can be recruited. Paul encouraged us to try to keep a Free Church presence in places where chapels have ceased to meet by going out into the highways and byways and coming up with new ideas.

**3- generate** – a large group of young people and leaders from the district are planning to attend 3-generate this year (65) and leaders of groups are encouraged to contact Nick Witham who is going to try to arrange a group photo.

**Christians Against Poverty** – Alex Rodmell advised that this group help people who are struggling with debt. 2436 people have been helped in the last year at the 10 centres around the district – but there are no centres in Stowmarket, Norwich and around the Norfolk coast, it would be good if people could be recruited to run these.

**Synod Soapbox**

**Ros Peedle** reminded synod members that there are differently abled people and we should be aware of their needs.

**Rev Charity Nzegwu** – reminded synod members of the difficult time people who are not white are facing at the moment and asked synod members to be mindful of others’ feelings.

**Mrs Aileen Fox**- told us of the, “old place for new people” at Walsingham chapel. This is opened once a month but will be holding a Festival of Cribs from 5th to 14th December this year to which all are invited.

**Seb Bell from the Learning Network** – encouraged people to consider the training that is available, which includes a Vision Planning Day, and to contact Seb if there is anything the Learning Network may be able to help with.

**Thank you** – Rev Helen thanked everyone who had contributed to synod and encouraged everyone to keep singing and maybe even dancing with joy on occasion!!

Rev Colin Telfer gave the vote of thanks to Thetford, Diss and Mildenhall Circuit for their hospitality – it was wonderful to travel around to different parts of our wonderful district for synod and we had enjoyed a wonderful day in Thetford. He asked Rev David Ely to pass on thanks to all those who had been involved from the church and circuit.

Closing devotions were led by Rev David Ely who based his talk about hopes, dreams and expectations on a reading from Hebrews 6 v 13-20 which included that Boy’s Brigade motto, “Sure and Steadfast”. David explained that his faith was rooted in the Boys Brigade. He had selected the hymn “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine” which includes the line “This is my story, this is my song.” It was sung with gusto. David led us in prayer and reminded is to eat cake before going home!!

The Representative session of Synod was adjourned until the 25th April 2026 at Sheringham Methodist Church and Revd Helen wished everyone a safe journey home.

Judy Read

Assistant Synod Secretary

24 September 2025