



The **Methodist** Church
Plymouth & Exeter District

Minutes of the Autumn Synod 2017

Held at Hatherleigh Community Centre, Hatherleigh, West Devon Circuit 9th September 2017

Synod opened at 10.00am with worship, led by the Chair of District, Revd. Graham Thompson building on the theme of the Presidential Year 'Day by Day'.

Welcome from the District Chair

The District Chair welcomed everyone to Synod

Welcome by Superintendent of the West Devon Circuit

Revd Liz Singleton welcomed the Synod to the West Devon Circuit. She spoke of the initiatives taking place in West Devon in the face of the inability to meet the Circuit's ministerial needs via stationing. Four Lay posts had been created to form a team she was leading. The District was supporting this work and anxious to learn from it. Liz pointed out that such initiatives were not new quoting from a leaflet entitled 'Souvenir of Special Effort' published in 1909 after a Circuit event.

Dispensations, Welcomes and Letters of Greeting

The Chair welcomed Sanya Strachan, Marketing Executive; The Mission & Advocacy Cluster, The Connexional Team.

Dispensations have been granted to 11 presbyters and apologies were received from 11 lay people and one presbyter.

Synod agreed to send Letters of Greeting to: Revd Herbert White following the recent death of his wife, Brenda; Mrs Rose Martin, Minister's widow, who is increasingly frail; Revd Denys Bament on his 90th birthday; Revd Darren Middleton on the award of his Green Beret.

Initial Business

Appointment of Scrutineers

The Synod approved the appointment of Frank Watson; Stuart Innalls; Margaret Cole and Jane Allin as Scrutineers

The District Directory 2017-18

The Synod Secretary said copies of the new Directory were available in District Boxes. He thanked the District Administrator, Mary-Ann Martin, Circuit Administrators and Superintendents for all their work stressing that the Directory can only be as good as the information sent to the District. An up to date electronic Directory is kept by the District Administrator who will also make any changes or amendments as soon as she is notified of them.

Representatives to the Methodist Conference

The Synod confirmed that those representatives already elected to Conference were: Revd Philip Wagstaff and Mrs Carolyn Lawrence for 1 more year and Revd Paul Smith and Mrs Ann Browse for 2 more years. As previously agreed, the Synod Secretary will attend as one of the lay representatives. Mr Frank Watson was elected for one year [Frank enables us to send at least one representative under 30 to Conference] and Mrs Jacqui Watson was elected for three years as a lay representative. Revd Liz Singleton was elected for three years as a ministerial representative. Revd Steve Santry was elected as reserve.

Conference Reflections

Revd Philip Wagstaff introduced *Conference Paragraphs 2017*, a leaflet containing comment on issues debated at Conference and prepared by members of the 2017 Conference Team. Philip built his comments around the candle burnt during every session of Conference, stressing the diversity of people and communities gathered at Conference to ask, "What is the state of God's work." He spoke of a conversation with a bishop from Rwanda about how to be church in a situation where there are pastors in prison for what they have done and a nation divided against itself. Philip saw Conference as bringing together the many people and communities who make the Connexion and hold our vision for God's possibility in the world. He stressed that we need to look beyond ourselves, to be concerned about numbers as detailed in the 'Statistics for Mission' but as part of our understanding of the state of God's work. "Together as the people of God we can do great things if we realise that God is the Light at the Centre".

A copy of Philip's address is posted on the District website with these Minutes.

Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network [DMLN]

Jon Curtis a member of the DMLN Team, gave Synod information from the DMLN. He spoke of pioneers who are seeking to reach out to people without the assumption of bringing folk into the Church community. The Certifacate in Pioneering Ministry run by Cliff College is now being run in the SW. Jon promoted the Manifestos from 3Generate asking that young people be encouraged to take part in the 2017 event. He invited people to speak with him about the LP/WL training and use him to iron out any glitches.

He advertised two opportunities; **What If – the Navigating Change Conference** 2nd – 3rd Nov 2017 at Plymouth Central Hall; **All Together Now** a free one day Conference live streamed about intergenerational Church Life. The DMLN Programme details many opportunities.

Jon said 'I really want to encourage bottom up influence with people telling DMLN what they need'.

The Chair reminded Synod that District was funding 10 young people to go to 3Generate at Southport - 24-26 November. Currently young people from Exeter Coast & Country and Ringsash Circuits were going.

District Safeguarding

Chrissie Slaney, District Safeguarding Officer, updated Synod on developments in Safeguarding giving a detailed presentation about the new **Safeguarding Handbook** which is accessed on line and is a working document subject to amendment. Chrissie reminded Synod how much of a leader in this field the Methodist Church had been and the importance of maintaining the standards the Church has adopted and come to be known for.

The presentation Chrissie made is posted on the Synod web site with these Minutes.

The Chair thanked Chrissie for all her hard and challenging work.

Telling Stories

Sanya Strachan, Marketing Executive; The Mission & Advocacy Cluster, The Connexional Team explained that in her role with the Connexional Engagement Team, she listened out for good news stories and for views about what churches and Circuits needed. She promoted the **Advent Offering Service** for the Mission in Britain Fund and the resources available for this service, detailing the work of Chaplains which is supported by the Fund.

A copy of the presentation Sanya made is posted on the District website with these Minutes.

District Policy Committee [DPC]

In the absence of the Secretary of the DPC, the Synod Secretary presented the report prepared by the DPC Secretary.

- The DPC has approved and recommends to Synod for approval (on the advice of the Devon Ecumenical Officer, Kit Harbottle) the revised constitution for Cornerstone Church, Torpoint. The Constitution is in the Synod papers.

Cornerstone Church, Torpoint, in the Plymouth and Devonport Circuit, is a long established Methodist/URC LEP. It is updating its constitution as recommended in the Churches Together in Devon 2016 review.

The Constitution has been agreed with the URC SW Synod Ecumenical Officer, who is recommending it for formal approval through their processes. It also requires approval by Churches Together in Devon as the sponsoring body. Once all approvals are given it comes into effect on adoption by the Church Meeting ‘

Synod is asked to authorise the Chair of District, together with the Superintendent of the Plymouth & Devonport Circuit, to agree any minor changes arising from these further consultations.

Synod approved the amended Constitution and gave the authority requested.

- Synod was asked to note that the DPC has made arrangements for the services of a District consultant to aid churches and circuits in fund-raising. The consultant, Mr Paul Courtney of Kairos Fundraising Solutions, has a proven track record in fund-raising and is being retained for six months which will include one training day. More information will be made available in due course.

The report was noted and it was also noted that an e-mail inviting interest and giving details of the arrangements had been circulated to Superintendents.

- Synod was informed that the DPC is considering what should be the District’s response to the significant number of new housing developments occurring in the District. To this end advice has been sought from the Development Officer covering this issue in the Exeter Diocese.

The Committee continues to monitor developments at Sherford and the Chair has had an initial meeting with other church leaders and the CEO for the Hinkley Point development.

- The DPC has used its delegated authority to approve the closure of the following churches.
 - South Zeal in the West Devon Circuit
 - Bishops Tawton in the Ifracombe & Barnstaple Circuit
 - Colebrook in the Plymouth & Devonport Circuit

- Synod's attention was drawn to the vacancy for a District Property Secretary (or Secretaries) and for a Devon Ecumenical Officer. Anyone who is interested in these positions or knows anyone who might be interested was asked to contact the Chair or Synod Secretary.

Revd John Haley asked what the impact might be on churches currently served by a Methodist presbyter who was part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership when change meant that a URC appointment would be made with no commitment to the churches served by the current Methodist incumbent. He had the Cornerstone LEP particularly in mind. The Chair noted John's concerns but was happy to report that the working relationship with the URC Moderator for the SW Synod was very good indeed and that together they kept these situations under continuous review.

Statistics for Mission

This item stretched over lunch with discussion in Circuits prior to lunch and feedback immediately after lunch.

The District Chair introduced a discussion of the **Statistics for Mission** as they related to the District and to each Circuit within the District. He said that the 2017 Conference discussion of the **Statistics for Mission** was very clear that there was a steady downward trend in membership which indicated that membership would soon fall to a level below what was necessary as a critical mass to recover the situation and sustain the future of the Church. He stressed that it is imperative to act now. There is a need for us to be motivated; inspired and desirous of change if things are to change. The key question for this discussion to focus upon was, "What is it we can do together to change the current trends?"

The Chair asked each Circuit to examine the statistics for the District and their own Circuit and to return to the afternoon Synod with one reflection which they believed they must share.

LUNCH

Opening worship

Statistics for Mission ... Cont.

The District Chair invited each Circuit to offer one reflection/suggestion from their discussion to the Synod.

Each Circuit made a contribution. It was clear that there existed a recognition of the urgency of the issues and a commitment to action to change the trends. **A detailed account of the Circuit contributions is posted on the District website with these Minutes as an aid to further discussion and action.**

The Art of Conversation – Jo Simpson, District Evangelism Enabler

Jo Simpson opened her presentation by acknowledging that for many 'evangelism' is a scary word and that discussion of 'Statistics for Mission' can generate a degree of 'gloom and doom'. Against this background she wanted to encourage optimism and opportunity. She said, "God has got our attention!"

Acknowledging that 'evangelism' is more than conversation, she said how much her work with churches and Circuits has thrown up that we lack the confidence to embark on conversation about our faith, both between ourselves and with those beyond the Church we would wish to speak to about Christ. This was sometimes aligned with an inability to listen well to others. It is difficult to speak effectively if we do not listen well.

Jo asked why we might be afraid of evangelism?

- Are we afraid of getting the answer wrong?

- Much of our culture makes us passive recipients of information rather than enquirers
- It's someone else's job
- Faith is private – it is not in our DNA to speak about it
- We fear rejection
- We feel guilt... we have been told to do it. Not in our DNA
- We don't have the language. We are hidebound by our own jargon

Jo suggested that 'faith sharing' happens 'in two directions'. It is not a monologue. It is no longer easy to distinguish between people of faith and no faith. Faith is a gift from God. It cannot be imposed. God does it through us. 'It is my role to create the context in which I can let God do it'.

There is a need to develop a graceful way of communicating faith. Sharing people's enriched lives. People are keen to speak about spiritual things. We need to join them. The pivot is to cease being people who teach faith and become people who ask questions. We need to develop ways that are more like coaching than teaching.

Jo then gave details of a programme to develop the art of spiritual conversation which can be made available [much like Mission Shaped Ministry]. Together with Revd Jon Doble, Jo is working with Mark Davies of Shoreline Conversations to build opportunity which will enable us to

- Become a District known for the quality of its conversation
- Become churches known as Christian communities in conversation.

A copy of Jo's full presentation is posted on the web site with these Minutes

Good News Stories

Members of Synod shared Good News Stories.

- ✓ Revd Paul Booth spoke of the impact of a lay worker in Wellington.
- ✓ Deacon Becky Lovatt spoke of the work with those recovering from addictions in Axminster
- ✓ Margaret Lintern [West Somerset] spoke of seeking agreement with insurers for the opening of the church and the consequent opportunities for conversation with those simply coming into the premises for a variety of reasons.
- ✓ Revd Dave Martin told of the day of Prayer and Fasting at Plymouth Central Hall and the impact of being available in the church car park to offer prayer for those using the retail facilities all round the church. Central Hall is also playing host in the Prayer Chapel to paintings by Ric Stott [who did the Holiness and Justice series for Connexional year 2016/17] and poems by Ian Adams over the weekend of 23-25 September.
- ✓ Helen Hibbard spoke about the growth in work with children at Chillington, South Devon where 6 children and 5 parents came to the facility provided.

Outstanding business

There was no outstanding business

Revd Jerry Cook thanked the West Devon Circuit for its magnificent hospitality, organisation and warm welcome.

Revd Liz Singleton led the Closing Devotions.

Synod closed at 3.30 pm with tea and cake.