

An update from your Methodist Council representative

Many of us wear several hats as we seek to serve various roles within the church. One of the volunteer positions that I have recently been elected to is that of (lay) representative from the Darlington District to the Methodist Council succeeding Rev Bev Hollings who has been the ordained rep for the last four years - the role alternates every four years between a lay/ordained person.

Most folks will already know that the **Methodist Conference** is the governing body of the Methodist Church. As Conference meets only once a year, the **Methodist Council**, made up of presbyters and lay folks with support from members of the connexional team, undertakes ongoing work on behalf of the Conference. In normal times, the Council meets physically three times a year but following the onset of the covid pandemic this has necessarily been adjusted to virtual gatherings using the Zoom media platform over the course of the last eighteen months with only one 'covid safe in person' meeting that has recently taken place at the start of this new Methodist year – my first Council experience!

To say that there is a huge amount of mission and supporting related and unrelated work going on locally, regionally and connexionally is an understatement. My eyes continue to be opened and amazed at what is going on across Methodism.

For those of you who are keen to know more about the work of the Council, detailed papers covering the breadth of what it is engaged with on behalf the Methodist church across the country can be found on the Methodist Church website but I thought that a snapshot summary of some of the key areas that are currently under scrutiny might be informative and of interest.

- **District reviews** – an extensive consultation on whether the current district structure remains fit for purpose or whether regional collaboration and/or a reduction in the number of districts might be considered in the longer term.
- **Conference structure** – again a consultation process looking at whether the current 306 conference attendees structure should continue in its current form or be replaced by a leaner structure of governance and perhaps meeting biennially instead of annually.
- **Ministerial pension scheme** – this is an area receiving particular scrutiny by a number of key Council members and specialist professionals led by the Director of Finance from the connexional team. Various related issues are being explored with a view to ensuring a more sustainable scheme in the longer term. This is a complex and technical area and I was extremely encouraged by the expertise and careful thought and discussion being brought to it.
- **Safeguarding** – Policy updates were agreed for publication/circulation along with the accompanying theology of safeguarding resources. This included a new Anti-bullying policy that was endorsed by Council. Following the recent publication of the report by the Independent Inquiry

into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), there was an acknowledgement that constant vigilance was required and that this remained a 'growth area' for the Methodist Church that was requiring of continued focus and oversight.

- **COP26** – An acknowledgement that the Methodist Church required to move incrementally to a carbon-neutral position by 2030 (a real challenge considering the age, nature and legacy of the property estate).
- **All of the above** as well as the connexional risk register; the development of policy on deliverance ministry; committee appointments; the implementation of the Justice, Dignity & Solidarity strategy (JDS); the introduction of an anti-fraud policy; a planned replacement for the current Chair of Council and decisions touching on Methodist Church House as well as other significant property schemes all came under the spotlight for group and collective discussion/decision. In short, a packed and necessarily time consuming agenda book-ended by collective worship all of which (in my opinion at least) demonstrated Methodism at its best and at work in the world.

I hope this brief summary is useful – if you require more detailed information check out the Methodist Council web-site in the first instance or get in touch with me. As your District representative to the Methodist Council I would welcome comments on any of the topics currently under discussion so that I am able to provide feedback and properly discharge my role.

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