



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

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Issue Nineteen
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Conference roundup:

a review of the Annual Conference 2021 of the Methodist Church UK

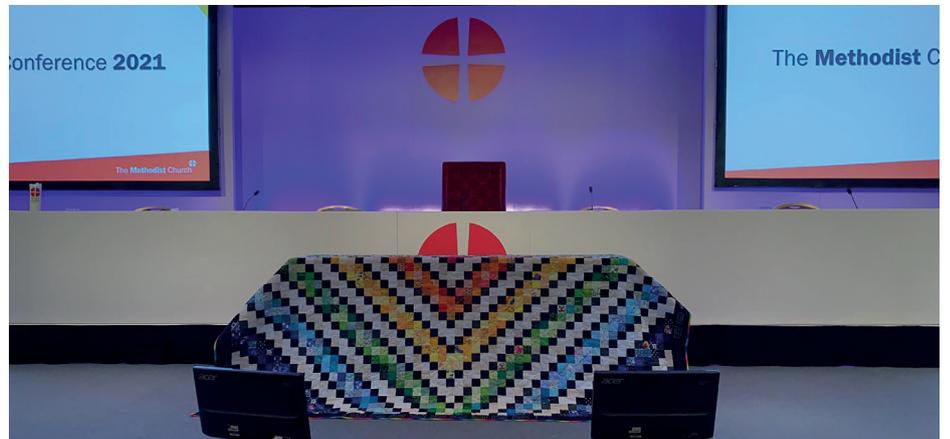
This edition of Grapevine contains a summary of the events, discussions and decisions of the Methodist Conference which took place in Birmingham from 24 June to 1 July. More information can be found on the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-2021/

God's Table: An Invitation to All

This theme, chosen by the incoming President and Vice-President for 2021-22 both for Conference itself and for their year of office, was certainly at the forefront in the decision-making.

Even in their physical identity, this year's Presidency reminded us of the inclusiveness of God's kingdom. The fact that both the **Revd Sonia Hicks (President)** and **Barbara Easton (Vice-President)** are women would have been unusual only a couple of decades ago but now it was hardly mentioned. Each year's Presidency includes a presbyter (President) and a lay person (Vice-President), thus continuing to emphasise the long Methodist tradition of valuing the voices of both lay and ordained people. Sonia is the Conference's first Black female President, and her opening address **God's Table: An Invitation for All** bore testimony to British Methodism's historic struggle with racism and inclusion. Barbara's professional life work has been in education; in her inaugural address she spoke of her passion for quilting and provided the conference with insights into how the expert quilter incorporates all the 'crumbs' (fabric scraps) into a magnificent whole quilt, much like the way God brings together our human diversity into a common beauty and strength.

Next year's President will be the **Revd Graham Thompson**, currently Chair of the Plymouth and Exeter District, the longest serving District Chair of the Connexion, and a white man (all are



included!). A local link for us – Graham is the son-in-law of our own Brian and Joan Davies, married to Alison whom many will remember as a lively member of Junior Church at Sittingbourne. Our Vice-President next year will be **Anthony Boateng**, an energetic young Black man who has been active in youth and young adult programmes in the London District.

This year's Conference saw the ordination of four persons with direct link to our circuit. **Jason Cooke**, **Ken Kingston** and **Doreen Koffie-Williams** all started out in our circuit and completed their probationary periods in other circuits. **Naomi Oates** has completed her probation with us, and I was able to be present at her Ordination in Walsall (just a few miles from where I started my own ministry in the UK in Great Barr, Birmingham) and to present her with a pottery baptism set on behalf of this circuit. I know many of you watched Naomi's ordination online as well. We are proud of them all!

The headline event of Conference was the approval of the resolutions which came out of the Marriage and Relationships report, **God in Love Unites Us**, especially the decisions to allow same-sex marriages to be performed in Methodist churches and to pursue further reflective theological considerations on co-habitation (living together as a couple without marriage). You will be aware that our circuit spent much time in early 2020 (just before

COVID) consulting, discussing, debating, praying about these matters. Those consultations established a firm pattern within our circuit of the importance of listening and appreciating each other, particularly when we hold contradictory convictions. Our circuit was represented at Conference by three members appointed by District Synod: Margaret Bowerman, Bart Woodhouse and me. The three of us do not agree on all the decisions made by Conference, but we are determined to continue listening to and engaging with each other in love.

I mentioned in the circuit online service just after Conference that for many the highlight came in the moments after the controversial votes, when the apology requested by our circuit – to express our sorrow at hurt caused to those who have felt excluded from the church because of their sexual orientation – was offered and accepted by Conference. I was personally very proud to have facilitated the process that allowed this expression of regret to be articulated. There is still enormous work to be done on these and many other issues. The rest of this edition of Grapevine will hopefully bring you up-to-date on the prompts of Conference to keep working to ensure that all are included in the work of God's Kingdom here in North Kent.

Bonni-Belle

[Note: the full Conference Agenda – all 979 pages of it! – can be found at methodist.org.uk under 'Conference 2021']

Be Bold: a few thoughts from a delegate

by Margaret Bowerman

Methodist Conference this year has been a very unusual affair. It was decided months ago that it was to be a hybrid conference, allowing people to join online or attend in person. COVID meant that the venue had to be changed, and only a week before Conference started, the number of those able to attend in person had to be reduced to just a fifth of the original membership. The rest of us ‘attended’ online from our homes, including Bart, Bonni-Belle and me. Because last year’s conference had been completely ‘virtual’, with much business postponed, this year there was an unprecedented amount of business which meant considerable pressure on time in the discussions.

Not being allowed to sing meant that our music was very different – normally the singing is amazing. Our worship group was reduced to just two; we used recorded music, including some from Ruth and Joy Everingham of St Peter’s Canterbury, who have supplied some of the music for our online circuit services. Joy is a deacon within our District and was a member of the South East District’s group of delegates.

On the Sunday there were services of reception into Full Connexion and

Ordination. Congratulations to our own Naomi on her Ordination. Our prayers are with her as she moves into the next phase of her ministry.

High profile on the agenda were issues of equality, discrimination and insensitivity. Our new President, the Revd Sonia Hicks, and Vice-President Barbara Easton inspired us with their speeches, introducing the year’s theme of inclusivity at God’s table. Sonia spoke of her own and her family’s experiences, and also those of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15: 21–28. Even Jesus wanted to turn her away at first, possibly feeling his mission did not include her. Sonia commended her boldness and tenacity in the face of difficulty.

This and the work on Marriage and Relationships raised emotions. There were tears of joy for some and of sadness for others, as the proposal to allow same-sex marriages in our churches was passed. Our membership reflects a wide range of theological diversity and some, in all conscience, cannot fully embrace this idea. Our President-Elect for next year, the Revd Graham Thompson, urged those on both sides of this divide to stay within the Methodist Connexion and find ways of working alongside each other, accepting a diversity of convictions.

Financially the Connexion supports many on-going projects. Like many churches, circuits, and districts, there are financial challenges which constrain provision of financial support to new projects.

Conference supported a notice of motion from Bonni-Belle to support Myanmar in prayer.

This year there was a bit of light relief focusing on a footwear theme. Often “killer shoes” are on the packing list for various members of the team who take us through Conference. Those were still in evidence both in person and online, on feet and on screenshots. At the beginning of the first session, when we were having instructions on how to operate our ‘poll cards’, the ‘vote’ was taken on whether socks should be worn with sandals. That vote was overwhelmingly lost! Later, one of our advisors recommended that, when working on two sections of voluminous Conference Agenda, those wearing socks with sandals, could remove a sock from their sandal to provide a suitable bookmark to mark one of the agenda sections.

Here’s to another year in Methodism!





Ordination: a day to remember

by Naomi Oates

One of the hymns in the Methodist Ordination service, “Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire”, is notoriously difficult to sing. It took me years of working behind the scenes at ordinations in my job with the Connexional Team to learn the tune, only to find at my own Ordination that we weren’t allowed to sing! I’d always wondered why it was included when congregations invariably stumble their way through it. But at our ordination retreat at Cliff College the week before Conference, we were told that this hymn had been used for over a thousand years at ordinations in a wide variety of Christian traditions. Over a thousand years of voices, raised in song, had been calling upon God to send the Holy Spirit upon women and men to equip them to fulfil their calling as ordained ministers in God’s Church!

At my ordination at Central Hall Methodist Church Walsall on Sunday 27 June, with limited guests and social distancing in place, it was good to hear that hymn sung by a small choir and to be reminded of the great cloud of witnesses that surround us, seen and unseen, and of the hundreds of family

members, friends and congregations watching online, holding us in their prayers.

Despite the peculiarities of an Ordination service in the time of COVID, that Sunday was a very special day – being received into Full Connexion with the Methodist Conference in the morning and ordained alongside four dear friends with whom I trained in the afternoon. I know that many of you watched online (and will have seen baby Rachel stealing the show by deciding my ordination Bible was hers for the taking!) and I’m so grateful for your support. If you missed it, both the Reception into Full Connexion and the Ordination are still available to view.

Thank you so much for your cards, your support and prayers over recent weeks and throughout my probation, and for the beautiful gift I received from the circuit – a baptismal set that I can’t wait to put to good use! I look forward to seeing you all again in October, if not before.

Every blessing,
Naomi



God In Love Unites Us

A Report to Conference on Marriage and Relationships

Certainly the Conference debate and resolutions which have received the most attention this year are those relating to Marriage and Relationships, as presented in the 2019 report, God in Love Unites Us.

Our own circuit's consultations on the report in early 2020 enabled many of us to engage with the resolutions proposed. Then as now, we do not all agree, and some have pointed out that much more essential than the subject matter at hand is the way that we interact with it and each other. The Church has gone through other debates of deeply held 'contradictory convictions' – debates involving slavery, women's leadership and divorce and remarriage, to name a few. Further back in history, there were deep divisions within the Church, with people being killed in disputes over whether lay persons should be allowed to read scripture for themselves. Even in the time of Paul, when the Christian Church was first being established, there were serious disagreements about whether to include those who committed the 'sin' of eating non-kosher meat or had not been circumcised. God has continued to work through the ages to show us how we are to love and accept each other, even when we disagree.

The God in Love Unites Us report and resolutions were due to be voted on at the 2020 conference, but this was postponed due to the pandemic and the then-new 'virtual' manner of meeting. A year later, the Conference's 'hybrid'

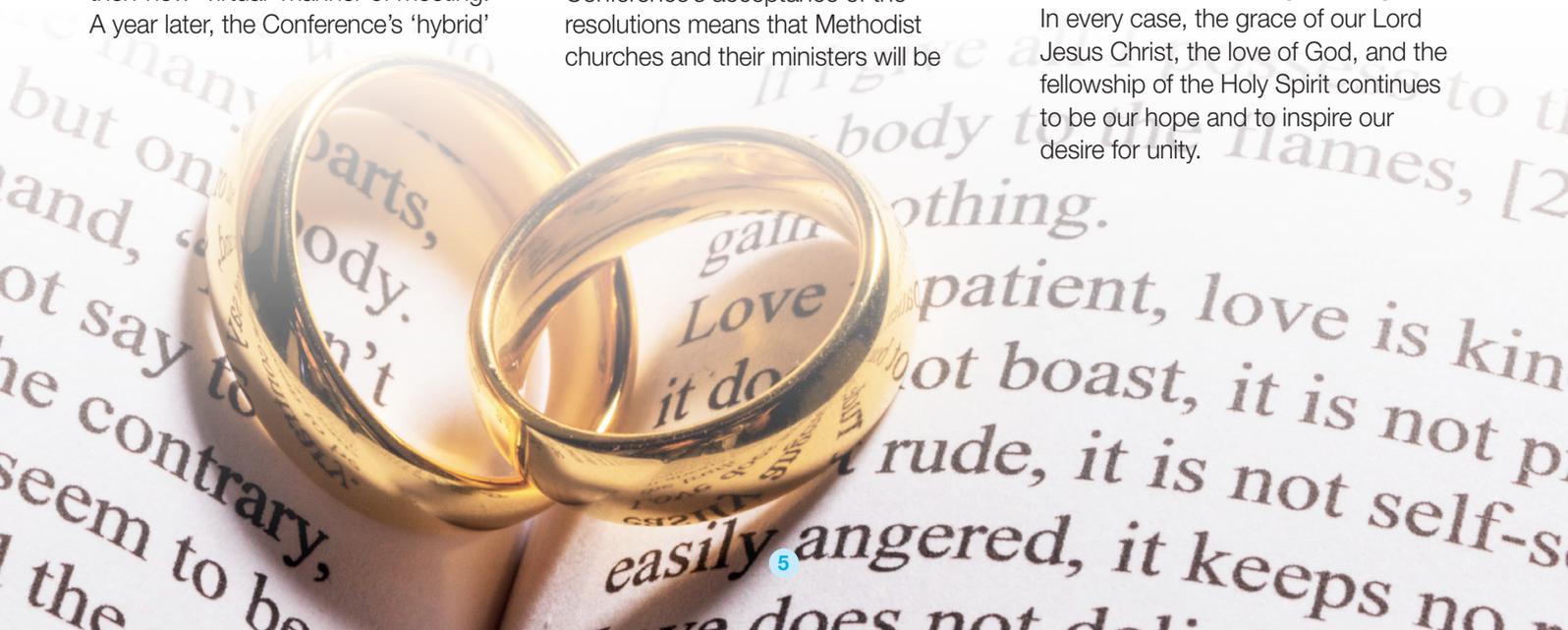
form, in which 20% of the delegates met in person while the rest joined in by electronic media (Zoom), meant that the debate could take place. Indeed, the debate took place over one-and-a-half days with many contributions from both 'virtual' delegates and those online. Early in the debate, there was a motion to block the report and its discussion, but that was defeated by a sizeable majority even as the objections were heard and noted. Throughout the debate, every effort was made to present and respond to different perspectives with grace. In the end, all the GILUU proposals were accepted with at least 250 out of 300 in favour, a 5-1 majority. (This was a very similar result to 2019, though the membership of the Conference was not the same.)

Most of the objections to the GILUU report were that it was not sufficiently grounded in scripture and that the theological positions presented were 'weak'. Members of the task force which had prepared the report noted that the theological work behind the report had been going on for several decades and that presenting a full theological rationale behind the proposals was not the remit of the group. It also noted that the current resolutions point the Methodist Church firmly towards a further theological journey, not imagining that we had yet learned all that God has to teach us about marriage and relationships.

Conference's acceptance of the resolutions means that Methodist churches and their ministers will be

permitted to conduct weddings or wedding blessings of same-sex couples as well as of one man and one woman. This permission is not a mandate, in that each local church and each minister can decide whether they want to engage with such (as, indeed, no church or minister is required to register itself for traditional marriages). Liturgies with appropriate wording for each situation were also approved. It is noted that the Conference resolution still needs to be approved by the UK government, and it is anticipated that this will not happen before September 2021 at the earliest. Only after the governmental approval is received can Church Councils make their further decisions.

Conference also approved further theological reflection on the practice of cohabitation, while recommending marriage as the ideal relationship for developing the 'self-giving love, commitment, fidelity, loyalty, honesty, mutual respect, equality, and the desire for the mutual flourishing of the people involved.' Conference emphasised that this self-giving love finds its 'supreme example' in the person of Jesus Christ. This self-giving love of God in Christ also reminds us that there is much hurt involved in the process of having these discussions. Some of the hurt has been buried for long years and begins to heal because the conversations are taking place. Other hurt comes as we begin to deal with deeply held convictions within ourselves that are being challenged. In every case, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit continues to be our hope and to inspire our desire for unity.



All Are Welcome

Considering issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

For several months, I've been privileged to be part of the Inclusive Church Implementation Group that has attempted to look at all levels of Methodist church life and consider how we can better ensure that, when we say 'All are welcome', we truly recognise the attitudes and structures that keep us from establishing a truly inclusive community. This exploration has not been without its tensions as all of us have to think again about assumptions and attitudes that we have grown up with, habits we have unconsciously adopted – the things that have caused us to consider others as 'different' and perhaps of less importance.

What started out with issues of 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' – a phrase which has become well-known in society at large – became in our theological considerations issues of 'Justice, Dignity and Solidarity'. It's not enough to explore our attitudes and assumptions, not enough to simply point out where we have fallen short and seek to make amends, but we are also called actively to work to support those who have not been treated with justice or dignity historically or in our present society. 'Solidarity' implies that we work with each other towards a society where we can all support each other. The debate is not only for the Methodist Church but is being heard across our global society, as the world's societies re-evaluate legacies of racism, sexism, classism and colonialism. Such explorations are often painful as we find ourselves getting defensive when issues are raised which seem to imply that our own attitudes or habits are wrong. I've begun to recognise my own defensiveness as a mechanism that can allow me to escape responsibility for my own privilege.

The **Justice, Dignity and Solidarity** strategy set out for the Methodist Church will involve further reflection

of every layer of our work together, from the local church to the conference level; from how we make appointments to how we celebrate the ethnic diversity amongst us; from how we affirm each other's gifts and graces to the language we use, especially language that marks others as different when the difference is not relevant. We commit to sharing our stories of inclusion and exclusion so that we can learn from each other. We will learn ways to keep each other accountable to ways of positive inclusion and how to deal with incidents of offense. We will continually ask ourselves what we can learn from difficult situations and how we need to change in the future. We will pilot systems for mentoring each other in positive responses and positive actions.

There is clearly much to do. This is not an exercise that we can leave to some committee but a challenge for each of us further to explore the ways we live our lives with and for others, seeking Justice, Dignity and Solidarity for all.

Bonni-Belle

Providing safe spaces

A further look at Safeguarding theology and practice

The Methodist Church has been at the forefront of establishing good Safeguarding practice in its churches and relationships over the past several years. The Conference received and agreed a major Theology of Safeguarding report which addresses many areas, including abuse and the human condition, biblical principles, language about God, the Cross and suffering, and the use of symbols and personal touch in the context of worship. It explores the setting and maintaining of appropriate behaviour and interpersonal boundaries within the church and community and how best to welcome and provide safe spaces for both those who have experienced abuse and those who have perpetrated abuse. It reflects on appropriate pastoral care and issues of power within the church and speaks of the complex issues of forgiveness and expectations of change and transformation.

Being good stewards of God's earth

JACEI: the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment

JACEI (pronounced 'Jacky') is the group that oversees Methodist investments, making sure that the way we use our money and resources is compatible with our theological principles. The most urgent issue at the moment is the Climate Emergency, which JACEI has been following closely for several years, especially in terms of the appropriateness of investing in stock of major oil companies. For some time, the principle of engagement – owning stock in such companies which ensures that, as stockholders, we have a voice at the table – was encouraged. In many

instances, this has given the Methodist Church a foothold in helping to keep such companies accountable for their impact. This year, however, divestment was made from several companies which were found to be in breach of their previous agreements.

Climate Change featured in several Conference discussions, and all churches and circuits are reminded of the urgency for a 200% reduction in carbon use by 2030! What we do with our buildings and our personal and collective lifestyles must also reflect our theological understanding of our responsibility to be good stewards of God's good earth. We can't leave it all to JACEI.



Money matters

COVID has affected Methodist Church connexional finances as it has so many other aspects of church and social life. While Conference received many memorials suggesting ways to alleviate the financial distress of some local churches and circuits, most of these were considered inappropriate or unworkable to be applied across the Connexion. Instead, Conference agreed a reduced budget for the coming year as well as a determination not to take on financial responsibility for new projects.

One major project decision that was agreed a few years ago was reversed because of financial considerations: Methodist Church House, Marylebone Road, London, was originally the headquarters of the Methodist Church's Mission Society which sent out missionaries and coordinated mission projects across the world for many decades. In more recent years, it housed the administrative offices of the Methodist Connexion, but

increasingly, the building needed major renovations in order to be of continued use for its purpose. The Conference of 2018 agreed to a £29.25million plan of demolition and renovation, but Conference 2021 overturned this decision by agreeing to sell the property.

As has been pointed out many times over recent months, the Methodist Connexion has very few financial reserves of its own, but over £200million is held in the reserves of local churches and circuits. The connexional treasurer and Methodist Council have had to make several difficult decisions over the past year to ensure that essential connexional services can continue. The Methodist Ministers Pension Scheme is one area that has been under extreme pressure over the past year, though adjustments in previous years had put it on a generally sound footing. The connexional treasurer now recognises that the current pressures are only going to grow with the number of supernumerary ministers increasing and the investments that have been funding the pensions decreasing. At present,

a £45million shortfall is predicted. It is proposed that all local churches and circuits consider giving 15% of their reserves to the Connexion to cover this pension deficit. This amount could cover the anticipated deficit for the foreseeable future. If the amount is not received by the Connexion, it is very likely that a further mandatory levy will be enacted, though those who had given voluntarily in the first case would be exempt.

For those who feel inclined to point out that pension funds everywhere are under great strain, and that Methodist ministers shouldn't expect special favours, the connexional treasurer reminds local churches that Methodist ministers receive stipends based on actual living expenses rather than salaries which would enable them to amass savings for their retirement years. The principle of the stipend assumes that an appropriate pension will be provided by the Methodist Church to its retiring ministers.

Our Concern for Social Justice

Notices of Motions to Conference

The Methodist Church in Britain has a long and proud history of working for social justice that goes back to its founders, John and Charles Wesley. Their Holy Club's weekly agenda was not confined to worship, prayer and Bible study but also included trips to the local prison and interactions with poor people. Concern for the vulnerable and disadvantaged continued through every part of the Wesleys' interactions. John Wesley's last letter was written to support William Wilberforce in his efforts to ban the practice of slavery.

Each year our Conference addresses issues of social injustice in our world, especially through its Notices of Motion which highlight areas of urgent concern. This year they included Myanmar, Foreign Aid, Immigration, and MHA (concerns for care of the elderly).

Notice of Motion: Myanmar

Many of you will know of my personal interest in Myanmar over recent months.

I submitted a Notice of Motion to the conference about the situation; the Notice of Motion was agreed by the Conference. Here is a copy of my speech and the Notice of Motion itself:

My name is Bonni-Belle Pickard, South East District.

I'm privileged to be able to tell you my name in safety. During the 2019 Conference in Birmingham, I had another privilege – that of sitting next to a Bishop from Myanmar who was a guest of the Conference. But I won't tell you his name today, because he is not safe.

As the bishop sat beside me two years ago, he quietly observed our deliberations. When he didn't quite understand something, he would point to it on the page, and I would talk him through it.

We stayed in touch after he returned to Myanmar, and even today he has been texting me about our Conference business.

In recent months, I have received frequent messages from him and other friends in Myanmar, telling of the horrific situation unfolding in their beloved country.

One of the first included a photo of a Methodist youth leader, one of the first of the thousands of young people killed by the military.

There have been more photos of babies still clinging to their murdered mothers, videos of the military police attacking train stations, houses, and hospitals; church buildings being ransacked with file cabinets being searched for information on church members and leaders; whole villages being attacked by helicopter and set on fire, and Methodist district superintendents leading their communities to some semblance of safety in the mountain jungles.

Some of the young men felt they needed to flee for their further safety – but when they tried to get into India, COVID was the new enemy awaiting them.

When I didn't hear from the bishop for several days, I heard from another friend that all communication had been cut off from his village.

Later, the bishop was able to send a message from their Annual Conference hosted in a larger city where there was at least some internet connection.

This cutting off of communication was part of a larger scheme by the military to keep their reign of terror out of the news – a mostly successful scheme, as the situation in Myanmar was rarely broadcast through the international news.

As I prayed about this, God reminded me I could use my own small sphere of influence, and so I began posting the photos on my Facebook page, though

some of the photos I received Facebook deemed too graphic to publish.

My friends have begun to share my posts. I also began including the situation in the prayers on our online worship service.

Now I'm asking the rest of you to help get the word out to the world: our siblings in Myanmar are suffering unimaginable terror. We who have the privilege of safety and voices also have responsibility. God's justice and mercy requires us to speak out for those who have no voices.

Notice of Motion

The Methodist Church in Britain expresses its alarm and dismay at the violence in Myanmar being perpetrated by the military against its own citizens. We grieve with those whose loved ones have been killed or injured and those who have lost their homes, villages, churches, and livelihoods. We express our deep concern for those who live daily with fear, and we share their anxiety over the potential for wider civil conflict.

We note the correspondence of the Presidency of our Methodist Conference to our partners in the region immediately after the military takeover assuring them of our prayers. We ask Methodists and others to continue in fervent prayer for a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict and a return to stability under a truly representative government. We continue to pray for those working for peace and for wise and effective responses on the part of ASEAN states and the international community. We encourage our congregations to make efforts to keep themselves and their communities informed of the situation.

Notice of Motion: MHA (Methodist Homes for the Aged)

A Notice of Motion was received and agreed by Conference on behalf of our Methodist charity, MHA, which works with older people both in and out of institutional care. It recognised the extremely difficult time that those caring for the elderly have had over the past months of pandemic and urged the government to address its failures in providing adequate support and protection including:

1. A new fully resourced system that ensures a fair price for care.
2. A national workforce strategy

that values people and supports the recruitment, retention and development of staff.

3. Transparency and accountability to ensure investment in the sector is spent on enhancing the quality of care, delivered through financial regulation.

4. Models of care that are co-produced and co-designed with older people and the [care] sector.

5. Seamless pathways and collaboration between health and social care, focused on holistic care when and in the way people need it.

All Methodists are asked to hold MHA in their prayers and to support its campaign by writing to their MPs about these issues. #FixCareForAll#(www.mha.org.uk/action)

Notice of Motion: Foreign Aid

The Conference notes with concern the UK Government's cut to the foreign aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income. As a justice-seeking church, we believe that it is right that richer nations financially support initiatives to tackle global poverty, address injustices, and encourage sustainable development. Methodists were highly active in the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign and the Conference is disappointed that its aims still have not been adequately met. COVID-19 has highlighted the world's inequalities and therefore this is not the time for the government to be cutting an aid programme which has in previous years been assessed to be of high quality.

Under the UK Government's plans, overseas aid spending has been reduced from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI), meaning the international development budget has fallen by around a third, from £15.2 billion in 2019 to around £10 billion in 2021. The 0.7 per cent target had been met every year since 2013, enshrined in law since 2015, and was a commitment of all the main political parties at the last General Election. As a justice-seeking church we believe that this is simply inappropriate and Christians must speak out about this.

The World Health Organisation has claimed that this budget cut will put the poorest countries at risk of "neglected tropical diseases" with tens of thousands likely to die as a result.

The Conference thanks the Revd Richard Teal and Mrs Carolyn Lawrence for signing letters on our behalf on this, and for the work of JPIT on this and many issues. It resolves:

1 That a letter be sent from the Conference to the Prime Minister and to the Foreign Secretary requesting an urgent reversal of this policy on the grounds of justice and human rights.

2 That all Methodist societies be requested to contact their MPs as a body.

3 That all Methodist members are encouraged to write to their MPs to oppose these cuts. (The latest information and a template letter are offered at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/aid)

Notice of Motion: Immigration

The Sovereign Borders Bill will be brought to the UK Parliament in July 2021, the UK Government having released their New Plan for Immigration which introduces a new 'two-tier' system for how we treat people fleeing persecution and conflict. Many of the measures outlined risk creating more injustices in the UK's asylum system which will increase the trauma and pain experienced by asylum seekers attempting to reach safety in the UK. They also undermine our obligations under international law. July 2021 will mark the 70th anniversary of the UN Refugee Convention, which specified the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of governments to offer sanctuary. However, the UK Government's proposals are at risk of contradicting the important standards set by the UN Refugee Convention.

Ahead of the Convention's 70th anniversary next month, it is more important than ever that we recognise and champion the rights and dignity of people fleeing persecution and conflict.

The Methodist Church joined "Together with Refugees" (togetherwithrefugees.org.uk) in May 2021. As part of this new coalition, we have committed to recognise that how we treat refugees reflects who we are. The hostility with which the government's new plans propose to treat refugees contradicts our commitment to uphold the dignity of all people. As a Church which is committed to a biblical imperative of welcoming the stranger, we cannot tolerate policies which risk

creating conditions which undermine this calling. As a Church which seeks to offer sanctuary, witness to God's love and stand for justice, we must speak up for human dignity and flourishing.

The Conference:

(i) Requests the President and Vice-President to write to the Home Secretary to highlight the potential injustices of the two-tier system, the obligations under international law and the need for human dignity and flourishing to be upheld

(ii) Commends the initiatives being progressed by "Together with Refugees" and the Joint Public Issues Team

(iii) Encourages churches, circuits and districts to engage with local MPs on these issues as the Sovereign Borders Bill makes its way through Parliament.

Notice of Motion: Climate change

On 14 June 2021 the Young Christian Climate Network's relay to COP26 left the G8 Meeting in Cornwall to start its journey to Glasgow where COP 26 is taking place in November 2021.

COP26 workers based all over the world (including those based in the UK – James Appleby and Mollie Pugmire) have done great work in bringing issues of climate justice to the attention of governments and the media in the run-up to the event.

There is a strong call from young people to engage with climate justice and to address the issue of loss and damage, not least from the Youth President and 3 Generate representatives, with climate change and environmental stewardship always featuring heavily in each year's gathering.

The Conference

(i) asks the President and Vice-President to write to the President of COP26 calling on COP to make bold decisions and to listen to the voices of young generations.

(ii) commends the work of the COP26 workers.

(iii) sends a greeting and message of support to the Young Christian Climate Network's relay to COP26.

(iv) encourages all churches, circuits and districts to engage with COP26 before, during and after the event including holding a Climate Sunday service ahead of COP26.

Transforming Lives

A Schools' Educational Strategy for the Methodist Church

Methodism has a long history of involvement with schools and education stretching back to John Wesley's Kingswood School and across the world in many mission schools. Here in the UK Methodism transferred most of its schools to the state in 1944 with the passing of the Education Act, understanding that to be the best way forward at the time. Today, there are still 83 schools connected with

the Methodist Church in Britain. More recent government action to change the way that schools are established and run has meant that the Methodist Church is now considering how best to expand its presence and interactions with many different types of schools. A statement of Methodist theological understandings with regard to education was adopted along with a strategy for better interaction with schools, including:

- affirming all those who work in schools and those who voluntarily give time and talents to support education.
- urging circuits to undertake audits of the schools work in their area as part of their mission...and to recruit governors for schools in their area.
- asking circuits to be active in sponsoring new Methodist schools in their area with the support of the Methodist Schools Network.

Reaffirming Our Calling

Oversight and Trusteeship

For many years, the Methodist Council has been considering ways in which oversight and trusteeship of the Methodist Church might be adapted to current situations. This keeps in mind the changing demographic, economic, numerical, and social conditions within which the Methodist Church operates. It continues to consider changes that might need to be made at local church, district, and connexional levels. Last year's Conference reaffirmed the document 'Our Calling' of 2000 which established four areas of commitment: Worship, Service, Learning and Caring, and Evangelism. It also set out some Key Objectives of the Methodist Church, which were reaffirmed this year:

- Proclaiming the gospel through worship and promoting the ministry of the whole people of God.
- Building a church for all people: an inclusive church which is diverse, welcoming and reaching out to the marginalised in society.
- Being God's church in God's world; striving for justice and peace; resourcing work and programs which transform individuals and communities; changes to embody the Kingdom of God.

- Having an Evangelism and Growth strategy (God for All); equipping Methodists to be people confident in evangelism and church planting.
- Resourcing the Church in the effective use of God's gifts (people, money, and property) and developing oversight and leadership functions appropriate to the Methodist Church for stewardship of resources for the mission of the church at all levels.
- Responding to the gospel in partnership in Britain and overseas and playing a part in the transformation of the world.

Keeping Our Calling and these Key Objectives in mind, the Council suggested, and Conference agreed, that some changes would take place at the local church level, particularly with regard to minimum membership numbers. Our Standing Orders have previously stated that a minimum of 12 members were needed to establish a new Methodist Church, and that when the number of members dropped below six, that church would cease to be recognised as a local church. This year's conference voted to raise the minimum

number of members needed to maintain a local church to 12. It directed "all Circuit Meetings to review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and encourage...Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling."

For our circuit, this review will mean that we continue to work with smaller congregations to determine how the ministry and mission of each local area can best be approached. For some congregations, it may mean joining forces with another church in the local area, either Methodist or from another denomination. For some, it may mean closure. For others, it may mean a renewed interest in finding effective ways to reach out into the community. There are no prescriptive regulations about this reviewing at present, but it is a matter on which our Circuit Leadership Team and Circuit Meeting will continue to reflect in the coming months.

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan September - November 2021

		SEPTEMBER				OCTOBER					NOVEMBER				
		5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	
BEARSTED	10.30	BYARD	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	-	-	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	HOLLANDS <i>hf</i>	PICKARD	-	READ	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	DAONE	ZACHAR	BYARD	
BURHAM	10.30	-	E VINCENT	-	-	-	-	NEWELL	-	-	BYARD	OATES	-	WILLING	
CHINESE	13.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
DENE HOLM	11.00	LA	LA	LA	HARFLEET	BURCH	LA	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	
ECCLES	10.30	-	R VINCENT	-	WILDING	-	E VINCENT	-	-	-	-	OATES	-	-	
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES	WALDOCK	SELMES <i>hc</i>	SELMES	SELMES	LA <i>hc</i>	SELMES	LA	SELMES	WATTON	TROTT	SELMES	SELMES	
GRAVESEND	11.00	DOWNS	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	GRAY	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	DOWNS	S SMITH	BURCH	LA	S POOLEY	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	
	18.30	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	-	-	-	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	-	-	-	-	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	-	-	-	
HARTLIP	18.30	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GRAFF	HINCHLIFFE <i>hf</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	WILLING	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GRAFF	M HARRIS	
HEXTABLE	10.30	LA	LE BOUTILLIER- SCOTT <i>hc</i>	LA	PACKHAM	LA <i>hf</i>	LE BOUTILLIER- SCOTT <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	GRAY	HARFLEET	LE BOUTILLIER- SCOTT <i>hc</i>	BURCH	S POOLEY	
	18.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
HOPE STREET	10.30	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	
KINGSWOOD	11.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
LARKFIELD	10.00	CARPENTER <i>hc</i>	NEWELL	LA	PICKARD	CARPENTER <i>hc</i>	WILDING	WEST	OATES <i>hc</i>	MYLES	WILDING	NEWELL	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	
	18.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
NEWINGTON	10.30	M HARRIS	BOWERMAN	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	R VINCENT <i>hf</i>	LA	ZACHAR	BOWERMAN	E VINCENT	JOINT SERVICE	LA	ZACHAR <i>cov/hc</i>	
ST ALBAN'S	10.00	-	-	-	-	TOLHURST	-	-	-	-	-	-	TOLHURST	-	
ST DAVID'S	10.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
ST LUKE'S	10.30	-	SELMES <i>hc</i>	-	TROTT	M HARRIS	SELMES <i>hc</i>	-	SELMES	PICKARD	-	SELMES <i>hc</i>	-	-	
ST WILLIAMS	10.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ZACHAR	LA	BROWN	ZACHAR <i>ca/hc</i>	ZACHAR	BYARD	WALDOCK	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	BROWN	OATES	
	18.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
SPITAL STREET	10.30	LA	GRAY	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	DOWNS	S POOLEY	HARFLEET	LA	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	
STOKE	10.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
STROOD	10.30	TOLHURST <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	M HARRIS <i>aa</i>	LA	STUNELL	WOODHOUSE	LA	M HARRIS	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	STUNELL	TROTT	
SWANSCOMBE	10.45	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA	BURCH	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	GRAY	LA	
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	LA	WEST	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	SHEPHERD	G HARRIS	MYLES	OATES <i>hc</i>	SHEPHERD	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	SHEPHERD	MYLES	
	18.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
EBBSFLEET	10.30	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	-	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	@ GRAVESEND	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	-	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	-	S POOLEY WOODHOUSE	@ GRAVESEND	
THE BRENT	10.30	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	HARFLEET	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	GRAY	LA	DOWNS	LA	GRAFF <i>hc</i>	LA	HARFLEET	
UNION STREET	10.30	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	D READ	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	G HARRIS	PICKARD	LA	R VINCENT	G HARRIS <i>hc</i>	PICKARD	PICKARD	

aa All-age / b Baptism / ca Church Anniversary / hf Harvest Festival / hc Holy Communion

Please note: These services are conditional upon government guidance and are subject to change.

They were all gathered together...

A consideration of online celebration of Holy Communion

One of the ongoing debates in Methodism that COVID has brought to the fore is whether Holy Communion can or should be celebrated via online services. Previously this had been rejected on the theological grounds that the physicality of presence, both in terms of those persons gathered and the actual blessing and consuming of the elements, was crucially essential to the proper distribution and reception of Holy Communion.

When COVID hit and our churches were closed for in-person worship, most Christians found themselves prevented from celebrating Communion. Some churches and denominations decided that they could celebrate through online services, but many did not. Indeed, most of our circuit churches have only recently been able to celebrate Holy Communion together. This has been difficult for many, especially when another church nearby seemed to have no theological problem with virtual eucharistic celebrations.

This year's Conference agreed to a period of exploration on the matter and discernment questions have been developed to aid the process. During

the period from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2024, presbyters and those authorised to preside at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper will be permitted to lead celebrations of Holy Communion in which some or all of the worshippers are gathered together through electronic means.

There are some important caveats to this decision:

- the virtual celebration can only take place when those gathered in person and those online are celebrating at the same time; that is, recorded services of Holy Communion which enable persons to celebrate virtually at a later time are not permitted. This means, for instance, that a virtual communion could be celebrated by Zoom but not by Youtube or Streamyard.
- the communion cannot be consecrated earlier and distributed to congregants to be consumed at the time of the virtual celebration.
- As with several other items of Methodist thinking and conferring, there is no compulsion on any minister or congregation to celebrate Holy Communion virtually.

Leasing Methodist property to other denominations

(deferred Special Resolution)

Some will remember our Circuit Meeting (along with all other Circuit Meetings) voted on a 'deferred special resolution' to change the Methodist Church Deed of Union so that leases can only be made for one year at a time. This change was agreed by Conference and now goes to the UK government for its approval. It is anticipated that the change will be ratified by September 2022.

For the next issue:

Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 20 September 2021. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.