

SYNOD DIGEST APRIL 2024



LOVING GOD... SERVING PEOPLE... MAKING DISCIPLES...

WELCOME TO SYNOD

Rev Dr Stephen Lindridge, District Chair, welcomed everyone to Synod held on Saturday, 20th April at Strathmore Road Methodist Church in Rowlands Gill and on Zoom. He led us in prayer using prayers from the Prayer Handbook.

APPOINTMENTS

One of the main items of business for Synod was to consider the nomination of a new Chair of District following the decision of the current Chair, Rev Dr Stephen Lindridge, to curtail his appointment. Also, as part of our proposed new way of working, to vote on the recommendation to appoint a part-time Assistant Chair to support the new Chair in the role.

Synod unanimously approved the nomination of Rev Jona Sewell as the Chair Designate and Rev Stuart Earl was confirmed as Assistant Chair. Prayers were said for both as they seek to work in collaboration with the Leadership Team to serve the Newcastle District, subject to Conference approval.

A nomination from the District Policy Committee for the appointment of Rebecca Beard and Luca Barwood-Plant as co-opted Youth Representatives on that Committee was approved by Synod.

Synod was informed that the Secretary of the District Policy Committee and Property & Finance Executive, Mrs Sheila Gibbon, will be stepping down in August. We were also reminded that as a District we need to recruit an Ecumenical Office, EDI Officer and Local Preachers Secretary. Synod members were asked to prayerfully consider who might be able to fill these vacancies, and share this with your Circuits.

THE MOTHER HOUSE



Rev Elaine Lindridge explained that her enthusiasm for working with the Pioneers can mask the real pot holes and bumps in the road. The reality of Pioneering and new ways of working is quite difficult. A particular difficulty is finding volunteers and as the work progresses this can be a stumbling block.

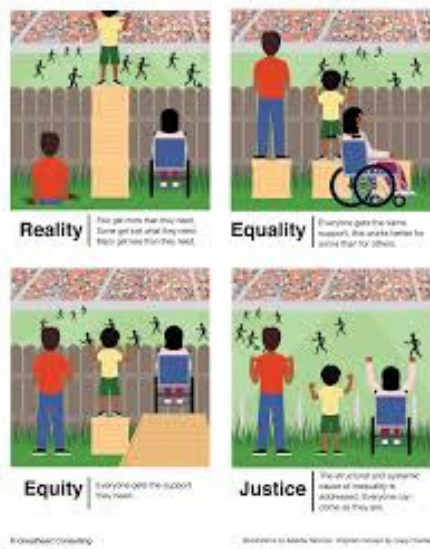
The time and energy to sort funding is immense. Even when work is progressing well, it can be harder to manage growth particularly at the edge of church where people can be vulnerable and often come from very different backgrounds. They may have had no contact with church at all and certainly wouldn't consider coming into our 'traditional' church. Recovery Church is such a good example of this, and it highlights issues around how to look after leaders and attendees in a safe way.

Nonetheless, this is delightful Kingdom work and Elaine encouraged us to continue praying for our pioneers.



EVANGELISM AND JUSTICE

It was encouraging to listen to our Evangelism and Justice Enabler, Kathy Bevan, who illustrated the difference between Equality, Equity and Justice. Kathy explained that justice seeking may lead us into the political space, or need us to challenge authority but that this doesn't have to be something extra that we take on. We should make an honest assessment of what we are doing already, asking whether we are engaging with communities, tackling issues of injustice or caring for creation? Perhaps we need to change what we are doing, or stop something altogether to incorporate the priorities of our Justice-seeking Church into our work in our local communities. There are lots of ways we can make small changes which may prove to be life changing. We might not be able to act on every priority, but we can all do something.



One of the questions Kathy is often asked by those in the churches she has visited in her first 7 months in the role, as well as in external conversations is "How do evangelism and justice go together?" Church folk tend to know what evangelism means, but can be quick to add that they are not evangelists. However, we are all called to be evangelists, not keeping the good news to ourselves. Let's seek to have 'gentle conversations about Jesus'.



DISTRICT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ENABLER



The work of Tracey Hume, continues to develop in unexpected ways, which were shared via video. We heard about The Honest Truth, where people from Recovery Church, Rehab and Oasis Community Housing shared their stories with civic, charity and business leaders. They anonymously explained how unhelpful and damaging some of the interactions they have with services can be. We then listened to a song which had been written by people in Recovery with the folk singer Sean Cooney. It is called 'See Me' and is very moving. (It can be viewed on YouTube, 'See Me' - Newcastle Cathedral Recovery Church - Music by Sean Cooney.)

CHAIRS REFLECTION

An extended time of worship ended Synod, Stephen shared a reflection based on Acts chapter 11, the growth of the church in Antioch. This followed the scattering of believers as a result of persecution. It might look like the Methodist Church today is not what it was and it had been sobering, noting the number of churches that have closed across the District. However, we have an enduring faith and hope. God for All and the Methodist Way of Life give us guidance for contemporary mission. The tree at Sycamore Gap was a symbol of continuity and resilience, but then it was felled, which caused so much sadness. However, new seedlings are being grown, which is a reminder to us to persevere and adapt, but also to remain rooted in the unchanging message of the Gospel of Jesus.

