

London District Synod, 10th September 2011

LEADERS FOR CHANGING TIMES

Cathy Bird, the Superintendent minister of the Hackney and Stoke Newington Circuit Interviews Alexandra Weeks-Aggrey, a young members of one of the churches and Dorothy Greaves, a magistrate

Alexandra, tell us a little about yourselves and what you found yourself doing in August.

Alexandra: I was in Tottenham when it all started happening.. I wasn't surprised it happened. It had been coming a long time. There is a big difference between the haves and the have nots. What happened to Mark Duggan was the hair that broke the camel's back. This wasn't just to do with working class people. This wasn't a random event, there was more to it than that, its not that there is a general moral decay.

Cathy: Yes, I looked at the papers and the photos of the riots and saw pictures mainly of black people. I then looked at the photos of a street party following the riots to bring the community together and saw pictures mainly of white people. But the reality in both cases was very different. And it wasn't just young people either!

Dorothy tell us about your role:

Dorothy: I am a magistrate. Our role is to uphold right and wrong and to carry out the right decisions. I sometimes come home wondering if I have done the right thing. Newham has lots of people with no money, no jobs, no hope and these things do not help.

What about the sentences that are being imposed?

Dorothy: You would never get a sentence of 5 months for stealing a bottle of water at any other time, you wouldn't be imprisoned at all for that offence. But the situation was so tense and there was such strong public opinion and political pressure that some have been sentenced out of proportion. I can only speak for myself and I would not want to judge my fellow magistrates but it does seem that some people were just adhering to what the public wanted rather than adhering to what was right or wrong.

What might be the most constructive political response?

Alexandra: The current one is not the right one. We need to understand what these people go through and once we've understood we can try to help.

Dorothy: There are a lot of barriers that still need to be broken down. Lots of people still need to feel they are English. We need to stop labelling people as black caribbean, black African, Jewish white, old and young etc as we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Parents have to be given back responsibility for their children and be able to teach them right from wrong without fear of themselves being punished.

What is the role of the church?

Alexandra: The church needs to reach out to youth who do not believe in God. These are the people we need to be working with.

Cathy: The church needs to be an agent for conversation. It can bring people together and be a mediator.

Dorothy: The church can be about healing, forgiveness.