

Visit to Hong Kong



From 26 October - 2 November Jenny and Stuart were part of a group of British and American Methodists invited to share in a programme of celebration and consultation hosted by the Methodist Church of Hong Kong at the instigation of its President, the Revd Prof. Lung-kwong Lo. Revds. Sue Keegan von Allmen and Nick Oborski (Supers of Circuits in partnership with Chinese congregations at King's Cross and Epsom) were also present from the District, as were Mr Alan Jameson, circuit steward of the Sutton Circuit and his wife Ann, along with Revd Nick Skelding (Harrow & Hillingdon) the last British Methodist Mission Partner in Hong Kong from 1982-1987.

The occasion was the 160th Anniversary of the founding of the Methodist Church in Hong Kong by George Piercy, originally from Pickering in Yorkshire, who arrived as a missionary in 1851 and spent 31 years in China – before returning to London to spend another 31 years working among Chinese sailors in the East End! The church he helped found now has 16,000 members gathered in 24 congregations and served by as many ministers.

Piercy's two-stage ministry framed the whole visit – which both celebrated the missionary heritage of the Hong Kong Church (gathering latter-day members of the Piercy family alongside ex-missionaries from both British and United Methodist origins), and engaged with the significant ministry of the 13 Methodist Chinese congregations that have been planted and are thriving throughout the UK.

Apart from many conversations in the course of the week, there were visits to see a number of the church's social and community projects (mission, education and welfare being the three substantial foundations of the church's missionary past and current self-understanding); opportunity to preach among the Sunday congregations and a trip to Macau - a parallel but very different ex-Portuguese colony some 50 miles away from Hong Kong which was the earliest European entry-point to China but is now developing around its dubious privilege as China's only territory where gambling is legal!

The visit inevitably generated many impressions and causes for reflection which will need to be processed in due course. Among them:

- The oft-experienced privilege of being part of a world church in which there is so much (of both similarity and difference) to share
- The link between heritage and mission which is so valued by the Hong Kong church and which our own Methodist heritage centres are so valiantly seeking to reclaim in the UK
- The naturally holistic understanding of mission (incorporating education and welfare) which seems to permeate the church's life in Hong Kong
- The intentional levels of committed discipleship - which for example require those who wish to tithe to apply for the privilege, accept pastoral conversation about the significance of what they are doing and regularly hand-over their contributions in person (rather than by Banker's Order !) – and seem to contrast so often with our concern to lower the bar of commitment
- The work of the International (English-speaking) Congregation where Revd Howard Mellor has recently been appointed and which has among its multiple congregations some 700-800 domestic workers from the Philippines as well as members from the business and diplomatic communities.
- The need to ensure that the work of the Chinese congregations throughout the UK is as well supported and encouraged as it undoubtedly deserves to be.

Of all this, perhaps, more anon !

