

Notes of London District Synod Proceedings Saturday 21st September 2024

Held at Westminster Central Hall, Westminster

District Chair, The Revd Dr Jongikaya Zihle, greeted and welcomed everyone to Synod. Jongi announced that this was an opportunity, once again, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women as presbyters to Methodist ministry in Britain. The Church was committed to fighting racism, fascism, sexism and misogyny. London had seen its fair share of violence in the past decades, but God has been good all the time. Jongi reminded Synod that we must trust God for what we are about to do, and God will see us through. Jongi thanked everyone in sharing in the life of the District, and extended a special welcome to the new Chair of District, The Revd Dr Jonathan Dean.

The Revd Lansford Penn-Timothy welcomed everyone on behalf of Methodist Central Hall.

Opening worship was led by the Revd Dr Jonathan Dean. Jonathan thanked everyone who were helping to lead worship on the day.

He read out to Synod, the names of the seventeen women who were ordained into the one Holy Catholic Apostolic Church and also paid tribute to those who went before them to pave the way for so many, in the years that followed. Jonathan celebrated all those who have come since that first ordination to proclaim God's kingdom alongside those who have had the prophetic call. These pioneers had often faced challenges but had known and sought God in the most adverse of circumstances.

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 8: 1-3, 22-31 was brought by Rev Hannah; a song of praise from Sophia, or Wisdom, who was present at the creation of the universe, the call of wisdom in all God's creating and recreating endeavours, in spite of human efforts to restrict these. God has said you shall not be overcome.

Jongi thanked Jonathan and the team for the opening reflections.

Order of business

John Logan (Synod Secretary) introduced the business.

Apologies and dispensations were given 21 Ministers.

Apologies were received 6 supernumeraries and 10 lay representatives.

Synod approved the new ministers to the District and the appointment of the scrutineers

Notices had been sent previously.

Synod received a video update of the highlights from The Methodist Conference 2024 and agreed one lay representative from the District and two ministers as representatives to the Methodist conference 2025 and delegated the responsibility to appoint the remaining vacancies on behalf of Synod to the District Council.

District Council Business

Priya Rasanayagam (District Council Secretary) introduced the business

Synod acknowledged District appointments listed in the 2024/25 Directory and agreed the resolution to delegate any further appointments to be made before May 2025 to the District

Council.

Ministerial Business was brought by The Revd Dr Jongikaya Zihle. Synod agreed the report from the District Sabbaticals Group and the resolution to approve the recent decisions made by the District Sabbaticals Group.

First Keynote address “A Thoughtful Imprint” was delivered by The Revd Dr Claire Potter, Ministerial Co-ordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries

Claire Potter thanked Synod for giving her the opportunity to deliver the address. She asked the question: “Have you heard God’s voice?”, making reference to the book, *The Old Ways: a Journey on Foot* by Robert Macfarlane, which talks about the landscape and wild walks, the wonderings of walking boots, following the snow imprinted tracks of animals and all the marks added by one, leaving footprints in the concrete path in the park, to walk around or trip over.

Claire explained that she had experienced something of this nature when she had read visitors books of pilgrims, in churches, the imprints we make in life were deliberate and are locked in a time capsule. Hymns too can make an imprint deliberately, in order to leave for future generations.

Claire asked the question, “The lists of our past...why do these matter?”, because history mattered. Narrating our stories prevented us from learning and trying to reinvent the wheel. Jesus did not say that the stories we tell will set us free.

Claire eluded to two examples.

The first, was in 2009 when Claire had moved to the Epworth Directory – to develop the Wesley House. This impressive Grade 1 listed house was the childhood home of John and Charles Wesley in their formative years. A tour of the house, helps to discover the different characters who made up the Wesley family. Meet “The Mother of Methodism” and the ten Wesley children. The Wesleys had rebuilt it after the fire with avocado carpets and matching bathrooms. This may have been very different for other visitors. The difference from world church to come to real Epworth.

All layers of later history had smothered the original features of the house, such as the fireplaces. When the house was built, a shoe had been placed in the wall for luck. The classes developed in Susannah Wesley’s kitchen. Visitors looked at and some had removed their shoes when they had crossed the threshold. The true history lay somewhere in between. John Wesley wasn’t a saint, He needed to control the developing society and control the future of the church. He was unsure as to whether he was being called to be a priest; he had difficulties in his relationship with his partner.

He was an example that the forgiveness of God is for all, not just for the chosen few. He has inspired others and helped them to grow in their faith. All of this changed people to bring calm and organisation to their lives, because he was a flawed human being, making it all the more compelling. John Wesley intention was to spread the Gospel.

Pray over the empty seats. Claire mentioned that she had recently visited a church. The majority of people who we meet at the gym, the bus stops and shops are unlikely to be at church. Where are the people who take leadership in church? John Wesley said that the people were too poor and had hardly thought about fulfilment of finding a way. They had no educational

support, there were no charitable organisations. However, John Wesley didn't do it because no one else was doing this. John Wesley did it because he felt compelled to do it. He returned after a visit to the US, following a failed ministry. He was a vulnerable person seeking to learn about God, but God spoke to him marvellously.

Small Group Activity: How can the real story of John Wesley inspire your church and community today?

The second example quoted referred to the importance of telling a true history.

Claire had been a community worker in Smethwick, during a prominent and horrible racist election campaign. All of the members of the faith community were Jamaicans. It had been an eye-opening experience for her.

She had been amazed at their hospitality offered by the community. She had become aware of the contrast between the dirty streets of Smethwick, to the beautiful Caribbean Island of Jamaica. The people who arrived found that their qualifications were not recognised. They had to work to make life better for their children. This was the experience to that which Claire had had when she was given the opportunity to train to ministry. 1998 was the 50th anniversary of the Empire Windrush. This was the story of her friends in Smethwick. They were newly arrived Jamaicans but were not welcomed in churches and were told that they were better suited to another church down the road. There was a Pentecostal church, and they had no choice but to attend this church, even though they came from traditional churches in Jamaica, including some from high churches. Without the Pentecostal church, which welcomed them, the church in Smethwick would not have survived. What Claire discovered was a far more complicated story than what she had been led to believe. It was known that in Brixton, houses and rooms to rent had signs in the windows as to what sort of tenants were invited to rent them. In the middle of rejection and cold-hearted racism the West Indians were welcomed to worship with us, in the Methodist Church even if they had been turned down by every part of British Society. After Windrush, The British Nationality Act 1948, which came into force on 1 January 1949, made it much easier for Commonwealth migrants to settle in Britain as it created the opportunity for all to register their British Nationality. The British Council of Churches invited the Government and Social Services to come forward and the whole situation was discussed in Church Times. Racial Discrimination Prevails in English Cities today, published in 1950.

When Caribbean migrants applying for jobs emulated their white colleagues but they worked difficult shift patterns. Church attendance was not on the agenda for many. It was not only the banner outside Railton Road Methodist Church in Brixton saying, "West Indians welcome to worship", the community began to change. Methodists posed the question of how can we help you?

In an attempt to bridge the gap and support migrants, the Anglican and Methodist churches in Jamaica sent ministers to work in Britain. Often stories were told from a guilt position. It is right we tell the story from injustice. Are we content to ignore the way they respond to God? Is it not better for us to celebrate that people took action when no one welcomed them? This is the true story and is the foundation of ministry and mission.

Claire stated that her experience of life was not one of migration but we should all give a voice to those injustices.

Small Group Activity: What does this real history have to say to our church and community? What does this real history show?

In churches, we must not sit still when we see injustice.

John Wesley's imprint has left a mark in many books and many projects, and in research. Then John Wesley's imprint provides lot more inspiration. We produce a stereotype of John Wesley's complexities of real inspirational life and let us celebrate what churches did for collaboration and long-term ministry.

If we are more deliberate about the imprints we make. What is our legacy?

Second Keynote speaker: The Revd Dr Christine Dutton, Officer & Tutor in Evangelism & Leadership

Christine Dutton shared that Westminster Central Hall was a special place to her. It was where she was received into Connexion. She had been a PhD tutor in Sheffield before that.

Christine explained that she was going to drop some pebbles into the pond.

Christine had spent the last few years determining what church leadership would look like in future years. It's not solely about the agenda and content – it's not the important factor. This content is only the vehicle through which we discover our conversations.

Voices and opinions have been silent or have been shouted down, where conversations were confrontational.

During her circuit ministry – Christine said she had spent a lot of time repenting from her arrogance. She was having to learn new ways of making the meeting places grace filled. What is God calling us to be and how might that change our ministry and in God's spirit, we of can do this if we were fully present in the places we are called to be.

50 years ago, Catherine Docherty was about to publish Poustinia, a Russian word, meaning desert, a place to meet Christ in silence, solitude and prayer. Catherine Doherty combines her insights into the great spiritual traditions of the Russian Church with her very personal experience of life with Christ. Catherine had been born into a wealthy Russian family in the 1900s. In 1920 she found homes based on the principle of Poustinia, of the Russian

Orthodox church. Men and women lived in the forest in Russia and helped people who were in need. Catherine set up community houses, seeking God and serving those in great need in all sorts of community roles.

Christine mentioned that she had found a copy of the book "Breath" in the wooden hut at Cliff College in Derbyshire, a best seller. There was nothing more essential to our health and well-being than breathing: taking air in, letting it out, and we do this some 25,000 times a day. Yet, we have lost the ability to breathe correctly, with grave consequences.

Award-winning science journalist, James Nestor, travels the world to find out what went wrong in our evolution of breathing — and how to fix it.

Christine said, for someone who loves to talk, this book had been a great reminder to be silent and shape and influence life.

Small Group Activity:

How can this shape the way I am fully present when I meet with others?

Where is the log cabin where I nurture this close encounter with Christ?

Rhythm and Ritual

Christine urged everyone to concentrate on their breathing. She said she was part of the NPNP Group in the southwest peninsula. At each of their gatherings, at the beginning, they invited each other to take a breath and breath together. Restorative breathing taking long breaths has been practiced in many spiritual groups, over many years. In Genesis, God created by speaking and bringing the world to life. God drew us close and held us in His working hands, giving us spirit and giving us life. We were instructed to slow our breath down. When we breath at normal rate, our lungs only take in quarter of the air. By slowing down our breathing, we allow our lungs to take in more oxygen from our breath. When we learn this, we can perform work/exercise with much less breaths. Taking slower breaths, purifies the longer strokes and increases our efficiency. Reflecting on that, how can we pray and discern scripture, our ministry and mission, if we slow down our breath, and take fewer longer strokes. We would like better rhythms and rituals of life. God's place is a natural rhythm. When we get colds and is much harder to breath, when our breath is shallow, it's harder to work. Don't just see breathing as an individual exercise but a synchronised activity. This knowledge has been around for 13 billion years. To breath is to absorb into us what's around us, to take in life and give of ourselves. Respiration is reciprocation. The fact that we breath connects us with others.

The body constantly recycles our breath. Someone's last breath is another person's first breath. We rely on them and they rely on us for very life.

Grant Taylor's Last exploration on cross, he explains air that breath is on-going, it was around on the day of Pentecost, and is still around for us today. To breath is to take in life and give life.

Christine mentioned that when she has online meetings, they often take a collective breath before they start.

Christine's question to everyone is...**How might we slowdown in our meetings and gatherings, how might we be breathing together and connect us with each other and God?**

James Nester... Invite a time of quiet, invite you to breath, to notice the people around you and recognise the interdependence between us and deepen our connection with God.

Close of Morning Session

The morning session closed with a silent reflection, remembering those who had died in the past year and a prayer.

Afternoon Session

The afternoon session commenced with the approval of letters of greeting, followed by a Communion service led by the District Chairs and Deputy Chairs.

Panel Discussion

The panel discussion was chaired by The Reverend Canon Dr Jennifer Smith.

Participants:

Mrs Janet Tweedale, District Local Preacher's Secretary

Deacon Marie Poole

Revd Esther Akam

The Chair asked the panel members

“What would you say to those first women who were ordained 50 years ago?”

“What would you have said to them now?”

“What would you say to them 50 years from now?”

Deacon Marie talked about unity between Deacons and ordained presbyters in the Methodist Church as we needed more understanding of the order of the Diaconal Ministry. To be able to celebrate both presbyters and deacons being ordained and working well together.

The chair explained that deacons and presbyters help one another and complement one another in their ministry

Esther felt that in 50 years from now, she would like to think that the celebration of women's ordination was no longer an event. Afterall, men are not celebrating their ordination, as it's accepted as normal practice. Women are having to celebrate because its accepted that this not standard practice. Perhaps in 50 years, we should be celebrating the ordination in a different way - not how we are celebrating now, at this time, perhaps celebrate our Baptism instead.

At the centenary we should review our processes in churches so perhaps we no longer have stationing. The colour of our skin, who we are married to, etc should not be protected but we should be here to proclaim the Good News.

Synod closed with a Blessing.

Next Presbyteral Synod: Wednesday 12th March 2025

Next Representative Synod: Saturday 10th May 2025