



WHAT'S OUR MISSION?

Lorraine Mellor

LORAINNE MELLOR URGES THE METHODIST PEOPLE TO BUILD ON THE TEACHING OF ACTS AND TO PLAY OUR PART IN ENABLING PEOPLE TO ENCOUNTER GOD – BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

On being designated to be President, at the London Conference, many former Presidents and Vice-Presidents offered helpful advice about the role. They all said one thing which has proved to be true, and it is that I would 'know and feel the prayers of the Methodist people'.

As I have travelled in just a few short weeks to a number of Districts, Uganda, Isle of Man, Hong Kong, Fiji, to my own synod and to the Liberal Democrats conference in Bournemouth, I have without exception been aware of people's prayers for Jill and me. I am reminded of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, who asked his disciples to stay awake with him to pray; there is no doubt in my mind that the Methodist people have not been sleeping when praying for and with Jill and me. We both use the 'Prayer Handbook' every day and join with the Methodist people in praying around our Connexion. This idea of daily prayer and devotion and following a regular pattern made me reflect on what I was actually praying for.

None of us can have failed to be moved by the latest report on statistics for mission, where we see some startling figures: 4552 places of worship, 1600 ministers – of which 180 are in chaplaincy – around

188,000 members. Our church is obviously in decline – but what do we pray into that situation? I also wonder what has to happen to our beloved Methodist Church before there is a recognition that something has got to occur to reverse this trend of decline. I believe it starts with God – and those moments of revelation in our worship when we encounter God – and it's in that place of encounter, of prayer, when the heart of God is revealed. This challenges me further: how focused are our prayers; how often do we pray asking God to reveal to us people with whom we can talk to of God; how often are our prayers focused so that the Lord will add to our number daily those who are being saved?

MISSION STARTS WITH PRAYER

Jill and I chose a passage from Acts 2 this year, to focus on and to develop as part of our theme:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their

food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47 NRSV

This passage depicts within it our two passions - my passion is mission and evangelism, and you can read about Jill's later in this magazine. I wonder as you read this passage, which is so familiar to us, do you pray as the disciples prayed? Mission starts with prayer and in worship. The passage tells us that they devoted themselves to prayer, and that word 'devoted' is an interesting one; it actually means very loving or loyal and is synonymous with words like loyal, faithful, true, staunch, steadfast, constant, committed, dedicated and devout. Do those words reflect your prayer life? I am not sure that they reflect mine; if I am very honest, I have found prayer hard at times, not because God has moved away, but because I struggle to know what to pray for. My prayers seem like a very long list of requests: bring peace to this situation, relieve that burden, heal him, release her, feed the hungry, care for the homeless, stop that war... You get my drift of course - and then I read the statistics for mission report. What do I pray?



How focused are our prayers; how often do we pray asking God to reveal to us people with whom we can talk to of God; how often are our prayers focused so that the Lord will add to our number daily those who are being saved?



I have been vocal this year and I have said publicly, not just in my presidential address, that I am not ready for the Methodist funeral - and I mean that. Why not? Because I believe that as Methodists we have much to offer our communities when you think of our emphasis on holiness, social action and on mission. I am not naïve - I know that it's about building the kingdom, not the denomination. However, for me the denomination is important; if we were lost from the ecumenical arena, our partners would be diminished, as we bring much to the ecumenical landscape. If we build on what was achieved by our ancestors, it will not be lost: they met in small groups studying the Bible and were accountable to one another; they could be found looking





QUESTIONS
FOR
REFLECTION
| GROUP
DISCUSSION

1. What can the Methodist Church do to reverse the decline in numbers?
2. Do we actively pray for our mission?
3. Do we actively pray that God will reveal to us people we can talk to about him?
4. How can we play our part to enable people to encounter God?

after the poor, feeding the hungry and being alongside those who were sick; they worked in the workhouse and the school, and they protested at the rally; and above all, they prayed together for each other and the church. So, we must be called to prayer.

WE ALSO HAVE TO PLAY OUR PART

I have also said that we don't have too many churches, we just don't have enough people in them. This is because many of us in my age group, fifty plus - which is the demographic in many of our churches - have never had to be (or not wanted to be) missionaries and evangelists; we have been devout, we have worshipped, we have prayed, but for some reason we have been reluctant to share our faith - to 'talk of God'. Now in 2017, we have to be missionaries and evangelists, especially if we want to see the church not just survive but grow. I am not ashamed of my God, I am not ashamed of the church; I love the church which has nurtured and educated me to be a disciple, and I believe that every person on this planet has within them a God-shaped hole just waiting to be filled with the overflowing, abiding, precious love of God. However, I have to play my part, not just in praying, but also enabling people to encounter God.

Have I been too reluctant to pray that the church might be renewed and revived? I devote myself to the apostles' teaching and to prayer; I do that in my house group, when faith can be unpacked and I can learn more; I do it in worship when I crave that deep, deep encounter with God, be it in stillness and silence or in the spoken, or in the praise and the worship; I do it when I pray, when I set time aside to be with God - when we

encounter God, that is where our prayer life starts. Then we pray that renewal and revival will come to our land, that people will come to know Jesus.

As the Methodist people, inspired by the Holy Spirit, let us give thanks and let us pray that renewal and revival will come to the Methodist church. Let us be silent and wait on God, let us read and reflect on his holy word, let us act and change the world, or at least our part of it, let us be radical in our mission and take some risks. This is no more than our great and mighty, ever-loving God deserves. Time is running out. So, what is your mission?

The Revd Loraine Mellor is a Presbyterian and, when not the President of the Methodist Conference, is the Chair of the Nottingham and Derby District.



Methodist
Evangelicals
Together

met

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY
WEEKEND 2018

A MIXED-UP MINISTER?

Led by the Revd Tom Stuckey, a former President of the Methodist Conference.

Friday 2 March - Sunday 4 March 2018

Swan Bank Methodist Church, Swan Square, Burslem, Staffs ST6 2AA

A time for teaching, rest, and mutual support for those in ministry for less than 5 years, and student ministers.

(Where applicable, spouse / children welcome for free.)

*Details and booking form are available on the MET Website:
methodistevangelicals.org.uk*