

MOVING FORWARD 2020

An online video conference, Saturday 18 July 2020

**Hosted by Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET)
and the Voice of Methodism Association (VMA)**

Summary Notes

For fuller notes and video recordings of the addresses given by David Hull, Sarah Sedgwick and David Miller, please visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/mf2020

1. WHERE WE'VE COME FROM: The Revd Dr David Hull (Chair of MET)

*Some reflections flowing from **3 John**. Please read that short letter alongside these notes.*

The letter was probably written in the context of **false teaching** circulating in the early church. It has a very contemporary feeling in terms of the current denominational debates.

In many ways, the letter's central theme is that of **truth** (vv. 1, 3, 4, etc). It is also a letter of **joy** (vv. 3, 4). Clearly it is possible to be joyful even when false teaching is circulating in the church. It was faithfulness to the truth which brought joy.

I believe the Holy Spirit whispers these words in our ears today: *'It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it'* (v. 3).

What does it mean to be **faithful to the truth** and **continue to walk in it** within the context of the denominational debates of our day? It will mean different things for different people. Do we stay/go/wait/expect to be put out? The most important thing is to **'do whatever He tells you'** (John's Gospel 2:5).

In the early church, there was an expectation that Christians would offer hospitality to travelling preachers and missionaries (see vv. 5-8). Such hospitality included sending them

on their way with **sufficient provisions** for the onward journey. If a time is coming when, within the Methodist Church, we must go our separate ways, what would it mean to send one another on our way '*in a manner that honours God*' (v. 6), with sufficient provision for the onward journey?

Diotrophes would not even read John's earlier letter to the church (v. 9). Beware when **communication and debate is stifled** within the church. Many believe that has been the effect of the Connexional consultation established by the Methodist Conference of 2019.

Verse 11 brings us to the heart of the matter. **Imitation** is part of human nature. What good would it do to a Christian to be in a denomination in which good is called evil and evil, good and in which 'malicious nonsense' is deliberately spread (v. 10)?

Who we associate with matters. One of the very positive things to come from the pandemic lockdown has been the increased associating of Christians online via video conferencing. The weekly Remaining Faithful prayer meetings on Zoom have been tremendously encouraging.

How can we associate more closely over the year ahead? I propose two levels:

The national level: We have already had initial conversations with other Wesleyan evangelical groups and denominations in the UK and will continue to explore ways in which we can stand together and support one another.

The local level: Are there other Methodists – individuals or churches – you could associate with locally to encourage one another and continue to explore options together?

A three-point strategy for the year ahead:

Speak up: Do everything you can to participate in the continued consultation process.

Build up: Let's encourage one another and build one another up in our most holy faith (Jude 20), keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, fulfilling his great commission. Come to **Liverpool 200** in the Spring of 2021! Details will be on the MET website as they become available.

Link up: Who could you link up with in your region in order to encourage one another, work together and seek the Lord's guidance for the future?

John ends with **a prayer for peace** (v. 14b). In his mind is the traditional Jewish greeting of 'Shalom', that deep wellbeing. That is what we need in these days. Let's pray for it – within ourselves, within one another, and within the Church.

For a full transcript of this address, please visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/mf2020

WHAT HAPPENED AT CONFERENCE 2020: Conference Representatives

Four Representatives to Conference shared some of the highs and lows:

- While the Methodist Church purports to be inclusive, this doesn't translate into the high educational level necessary for Conference reps. All reps were required to read through three large agendas plus daily papers, thus requiring a high level of literacy and an understanding of how to engage with the issues under discussion.
- A large number of speakers were from the LGBTQI+ networks and it was evident that there was an underlying thread of bias to their ideology throughout much of the discussions.
- The 'revisionist' community was very organised in taking opportunities to speak, and evangelicals need to take more opportunities to speak up at Conference in the future.
- Many of the reports had little spiritual content, and were more to do with ethics and ecology.
- The Conference addresses by the President and the Vice-President were powerful, refreshing and impacting.
- The Reception into Full Connexion for ministers was a very moving and a special occasion.
- The report on exorcism has been delayed, so Conference agreed that no exorcisms can be done within the Methodist Church this year. This is a decision which seems to go against the teaching of Jesus.
- While being grateful for the immense amount of work done by the technical team to make Conference possible via Zoom, it wasn't possible to have the same level of discussion as usual, so proper 'conferring' didn't really happen.

THE YEAR AHEAD: The Revd David Miller (Vice-Chair of VMA)

The book of Nehemiah has many parallels with our own context; and has strategies for dealing with a broken down situation as we look to the year ahead.

- 1. We need to recognise how bad and broken the situation is**, and we need to be 'for' things, not just 'against' things.
- 2. Gather and cast a vision of how things could be better**, pray and stand with one another.
- 3. Take heart and get on with the work**,
- 4. Build your house.** We need to follow Nehemiah's example, and work where we are, and with one another, to rebuild faithful communities. MET and VMA are willing to help you co-ordinate with others in your area.

5. Act strategically. Volunteer to be a representative to your circuit meeting, district synod and to Conference; be vocal and vote when you have the opportunity. Consider sending a Memorial to Conference; MET and VMA can offer guidance.

Each spring every Presbyterian and Deacon has to affirm they believe in the doctrines and accept and administer the discipline of the Methodist Church. If the GILUU proposals are ratified at Conference 2021, we need to make it clear that we are being asked to deny the teaching we were required to affirm when we were ordained. In Acts 5, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin and were questioned about their teaching of Jesus. They replied that they must obey God rather than people.

What can we do to make every District Chair and every minister aware of how unworkable a change in the definition of marriage will be? Jesus said: *'Be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves'* (Matthew 10:16).

6. Expect opposition and respond appropriately. In Nehemiah, each of the builders were prepared; while half of the men did the work, the other half kept watch. We need to work and pray.

7. They got on with the work and built the new city: for us this about building the new, renewed Methodism.

This extra year gives us an opportunity to **pray, plan and act.**

TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S LOVE: Sarah Sedgwick

Sarah's background was within the LGBTQ + lifestyle. Five and a half years ago she became a Christian, and in obedience to the Lord recognised that she could no longer live within that lifestyle. There is a very strong and organized LGBTQ + lobby within the Methodist Church, and another voice needs to be heard, so she has established **Transformed Ministries**. Sarah's life testifies that God's transformational power can change people. There are many people coming out of the gay lifestyle and living for God; this is a very positive message.

Sarah works with Christians who have come out of the gay lifestyle and they are working on how to make churches **'truly inclusive for all'** in the right sense of that phrase. Transformed Ministries is exploring how churches can be havens of welcome, nurture and discipleship for people who struggle, or have struggled, with same-sex attraction.

Transformed Ministries has the following mission:

- To support churches, ministers and pastoral workers.
- To support individuals who have experienced same-sex attraction and want to live in obedience to God's Word.
- To support family members of individuals who are living within a LGBTQI+ lifestyle.

Sarah is happy to advise, support, provide testimony and to speak to church councils via Zoom or in person (when permitted). Please visit **transformedbygodslove.com** for more information.

SPOTLIGHTS AROUND THE CONNEXION

The Remaining Faithful Network, MET and VMA are not promoting any one option for the way forward and seek to support every evangelical Methodist. The afternoon began with a number of individuals sharing a variety of ways that people are currently responding to the denominational debates, both personally and as local churches. These summaries have been anonymised to protect identities.

From a Methodist Presbyterian:

Across the Connexion there are pockets of faithful Methodist people with a thirst for God's Word and a desire to see the Holy Spirit move. There is a great need to be people who speak God's truth in love and to be truly inclusive: to share Jesus and allow the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of its need for salvation. Where God's people gather and the Word is faithfully preached, the church is growing. This minister believes that, for her, God's calling is to stay within this denomination in which she was ordained, and to equip the people of God in the Methodist Church to serve their local communities.

Negotiating Leaving:

A lay person shared that his church, which has a long evangelical heritage, informed their circuit, in the autumn of 2019, that they could no longer accept their authority and would withhold their assessment from September 2020. Even though the provisional resolutions have not yet been ratified, they are planning to leave the Methodist Connexion this year. The church has never received Methodist grants for property improvements, so consider that the building belongs to them. It's similar to Naboth's vineyard: '*The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.*' Negotiations about the building are continuing. Some of the congregation have formed an independent fellowship with charity status. Two other churches in the circuit are also considering leaving Methodism.

The Free Methodist Church UK:

A lay leader shared that his church had been increasingly concerned about the direction of travel of the Methodist Church, and in the autumn of 2019 the church voted to leave the Connexion. The Circuit Leadership Team graciously allowed them to rent their building for up to 12 months while they sought new premises. This church reached out to the Free Methodists, who have a few churches locally, and found that they shared the same passions. They have now entered a process of affiliation; after that time they can enter into a full commitment.

Financial and Preaching Implications for Circuits:

A lay person shared that within the circuit there are seven evangelical local preachers; four of whom will resign if the provisional resolutions are accepted. This has serious implications for the preaching plan and financial implications in the circuit. This person was suspended from the preaching plan for 3 months after preaching against worldliness. Methodism does not realize the casualties that its direction of travel will create. This church is uncertain about the way ahead; the Free Methodist Church sounds attractive but there is none in their area.

Deferring Decisions until after the Provisional Resolutions are Decided:

A lay person shared that her 100-member strong church has been a solid evangelical church for decades with sound preaching and biblical teaching in house groups. The church has taken a biblical position on the issue of same-sex marriage and voted by a large majority against the provisional resolutions. The church council expects to move the church out of the Methodist Church but has deferred any decision until after Conference 2021.

Independent Methodist Connexion:

A lay person shared that their small village congregation has been so troubled by the provisional resolutions that, at the end of August 2020, their whole congregation is transferring to the Independent Methodist Church. A few years ago they gave up their Methodist building, and have since been worshipping in the Parish Church, and this arrangement is to continue.

Pioneer Network:

A Methodist Church, together with its minister, is expecting to move to the Pioneer Network soon. They have received good support from the Pioneer Network and sense God leading them in that direction.

Methodist Minister's Housing Society:

The MMHS has clarified that, if Supernumerary Ministers leave the Methodist Church, they will be able to remain in their accommodation. For those who are hoping to move into such accommodation, but may leave the Methodist Church, they will still be eligible provided they have served in the Methodist Church for ten years out of their last twenty years in ministry. It is thought that the rent would continue to be significantly lower than the open market value.

Front Runner Group:

A number of churches around the Connexion feel it is necessary to explore leaving the Methodist Church, either now or in the future, in the light of the current denominational debates. If your church is in that position, please contact the MET Development Worker (development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk) so that we can host a joint meeting to share news and help to coordinate developments.

A Turnaround?

Some recent prophetic words have spoken of the Methodist Church repenting, and of it becoming a phoenix rising from the ashes. In addition to making plans for a future outside the Methodist Church, we should still pray and hope for a turnaround, especially in the light of 2 Chronicles 7:14:

***'If my people, who are called by my name,
will humble themselves and pray and seek my face
and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven,
and I will forgive their sins and will heal their land.'***