



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

Throughout these debates on *God In Love Unites Us*, my mind has frequently turned to the famous confrontation in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster almost fifty-five years ago between John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Stott and Lloyd-Jones were two of the most prominent evangelical ministers of the day. During the meeting, to Stott's dismay, Lloyd-Jones used the opportunity as speaker to call evangelicals to leave the mainline denominations and to unite in a new evangelical movement. Stott later described how he looked out from the platform and saw many Anglican evangelical ministers sitting on the edges of their seats, ready to get up and follow Lloyd-Jones. Although he was the Chair and it would be considered a breach of convention to do so, Stott felt he must intervene. He contradicted Lloyd-Jones and called upon evangelicals to stay in their denominations to work for change from within. A rift thus opened within British evangelicalism.

Throughout the years of their existence, the evangelical movements within the British Methodist Church have taken Stott's line, encouraging evangelicals to work for change from within the denomination. However, they have also held that there would be lines that, if crossed, might make it untenable to remain, not least in 1993 when the last major debate on marriage and human relationships was held.

The Methodist Conference has now voted to affirm cohabitation (that is, sexual intimacy outside marriage), to change its definition of marriage, and to permit same-sex marriages to take place on Methodist premises. Enshrining what many believe to be unbiblical teaching into its constitution, practice and discipline means, for some, that the line has now been crossed and they cannot in good conscience remain within the Methodist Church. For some ministers and preachers this means that they can no longer affirm they continue to preach the doctrines and administer the discipline of the Methodist Church.

We can no longer take the line of John Stott, encouraging evangelicals to stay within their denomination. However, neither do we take Martyn Lloyd-Jones' line, of encouraging evangelicals to leave. Throughout these debates, we have simply encouraged all to seek the Lord and 'do whatever he tells you', with the commitment that we will seek to support all evangelicals, whatever course they take. I hope this issue of MET Connexion, presenting a variety of responses, will be of use as we all seek the way forward.

These momentous developments within the Church have taken place within the context of momentous events within the world. I am so grateful to our MET team, not least our Development Worker, the Revd Derek Balsdon, who has worked flexibly and inventively to develop the work of MET in these troubling times, enabling us to rise to the challenges and opportunities of a global pandemic. Now that travel and in-person meetings have become possible again, please do consider inviting Derek to speak at local events.

It is a great privilege to have been unanimously re-elected at the AGM for a further term of office as Chair of MET. I am very grateful to have this opportunity to see through to completion the work in this season of denominational life. Although the term of office is for three years, I believe it is right that we should transition to a new Chair within that timeframe, rather than at its end.

As over the previous years, so I believe there are considerable challenges ahead for Methodist Evangelicals Together. Now that the Conference has made its decisions relating to *God In Love Unites Us*, within MET we need to support everyone in making their own decisions about the future, encourage our members to contribute to the decisions in local churches, play our role in negotiating with the Connexional team and committees, and then steady the ship. A new Chair will then be able to lead our movement into a new season with these denominational debates behind us.

Whilst we have taken different positions within these debates, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Revd Ashley Cooper, Principal of Cliff College and member of the *God In Love Unites Us* task group. Within a certain inevitable direction of travel, he discerned the battles he could win and, at considerable personal cost, secured a conscience clause which seeks to protect the right of evangelicals to continue to hold and promote the traditional teaching of the Christian Church.

I have been greatly encouraged by those who have said that, though they are content with the *God In Love Unites Us* resolutions, they are committed to working together to hold the Church to account on the promises it has made. This we must do, not least for the sake of those who remain and, most of all, for the sake of the gospel: 'If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other' (Galatians 5:15).

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

David