

The Gentle Whispers of Providence

DAVID HULL



This final letter from David Hull, our outgoing Chair, has been specially moved from the back of the magazine to the front. He reflects on two decades of work with MET (and Headway, our predecessor organisation), looking to the future with hope.

'I have found the Book of the Law'

(2 Kings 22:8)

How formative our early years of life are! When I heard the news that the headmaster from my school days, Dr John Wroughton, had died, I had a strong sense that I should go to his memorial service, and bring with me my wife, Sarah (who had never known him).

The service, held in Bath Abbey, was a fitting celebration, honouring his life, faith and legacy. Afterwards, we crossed the road to the city's Guildhall for a reception and sat down with plates of sandwiches. We were soon joined by an elderly gentleman who, it emerged, was Dr Wroughton's best friend from his own school days. He shared with us the central role 'John' (as he knew him) had played in bringing him to faith.

As we chatted, two others came over and we discovered they were all related. One recognised us and introduced Sarah to the others as a member of the Church family of the East African Revival. The third man, a retired Royal Navy Commander, looked at Sarah and said, 'Joe Church!' She explained that he had been her great uncle, and he told us how Joe Church's son had led his brother to the Lord who, in turn, had led him to the Lord.

We were soon talking animatedly about revival. 'Sadly, they all seem to fizzle out in the end,' the Commander said, and I quipped, 'We're praying for them to fizzle in again!' He lifted his eyes and hands to heaven and loudly said, 'Yes please, Lord!' It was an unforgettable conversation in a very surprising setting. As we said our goodbyes, the older of the men – the schoolboy friend – quietly said, 'I think we have heard the gentle whispers of providence today.'

REDISCOVERY, REFORM & REVIVAL

The school I attended under Dr Wroughton's headship was founded by Edward VI. He came to the throne at the age of nine, and reigned over a period of educational and religious reform – a revival in which the Word of God was rediscovered. For the first time in history, the Bible was made widely available to the general population in English translation.

King Josiah was an even greater boy king who reigned over a period of even greater rediscovery, reform and revival (2 Kings 22-23). Eight years old when he ascended to the throne, he recommissioned the temple repairs and the Book of the Law was rediscovered. Shocked to the core as it was read, he launched a programme of national reform.

DISCOVERING EVANGELICAL METHODISM

Like us all, I testify to my own experience of the gentle whispers of God's providence: my mother led me to faith when I was 7, reading to me the story of Nicodemus from our children's Bible; a Sunday School teacher memorably taught me about the Good Shepherd; our village chapel (established by my great grandparents amongst others), became my spiritual home; the discovery of the life-giving authority of the Bible and the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit came in my mid-teens; and, a couple of years later, I discerned a call to ministry.

I first became aware of Headway (MET's predecessor) at Easter People. Rev Phil Snelson – then responsible for student minister care – later visited the college at which I trained and invited us to the student minister conferences. As I reached the end of my training, Rev Paul Smith, then Chair of Headway, invited me to join the executive committee myself.

In the Autumn of 2004, I therefore found myself at Clifft College, surrounded – somewhat intimidatingly – by some of the great luminaries of evangelical Methodism, for my first executive committee meeting. I succeeded Phil Snelson, taking responsibility for student minister care, later becoming responsible for overseeing Theology and Research. In 2013, I became Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together (renamed from Headway in 2007).

It has been a great privilege to have been involved in such work over these two decades: the student minister conferences; support for the Methodist Church's Year of the Bible; the development of the Digging for Treasure expository preaching conferences (link.metrevive.uk/dft); producing our WHOTWay series of videos for group discussion (whotway.com). One of the most exciting developments in recent years has been the formation of the Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE), growing out of a longing for greater cooperation among evangelical Methodist organisations and denominations, seeking nothing less than a rekindling of the Wesleyan flame in the motherland of Methodism.

CONTROVERSY AND CHALLENGE

The last decade has not been unmarked by controversy and challenge. We could not have anticipated the magnitude and pace of change on the horizon in terms of the Methodist Church's approach to marriage and



relationships. Throughout these discussions, we have striven to uphold biblical truth with compassion and conviction, seeking to be a voice for good within the broader denominational debates.

While the debates and their consequences have been immensely difficult, we have nevertheless known gentle whispers of providence throughout. We experienced an unprecedented growth in membership following the decisions of the Methodist Conference in 2021, though we have also said farewell to many who have moved to pastures new, feeling they could not in good conscience remain in the denomination.

NEW SEASON, NEW VISION

In the aftermath of the Conference decisions, we discerned a call to a new vision for a new season – placing prayer for revival 'front and centre' in our ministry once again, as set out in the previous edition of RE:VIVE (link.metrevive.uk/Spring24). Thus Methodist Evangelicals Together has become MET:Revive, continuing as a river flowing with the water of three streams – our founding organisations, Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism, the charismatic Dunamis magazine, and the Methodist Revival Fellowship.

All around us, the church and the world are continually changing. Ancient battles have re-emerged, as I explore briefly in the Bible Study within these pages, and we have much to learn from the early church. Like that of Josiah, Edward VI, and indeed, our founding Wesley brothers, our greatest need today is for rediscovery, reform and revival.

Revival is (as ever) our only hope. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that brought the church to birth (Acts 2); the Spirit has brought new life throughout history; such is the heritage in which we stand. Come what may, whatever we discover of the Lord in seeking him, will never be lost. As institutions crumble, faithful local churches will remain standing as pillars (Revelation 3:12).

GOING WITH GRATITUDE

This Autumn, I will pass the baton of chairmanship to Rev Chris Briggs. I do so with immense gratitude – for the privilege of serving in this role; for the support of our members; and for the collegiality of numerous executive committee members over the years. I'm especially thankful for the ministry of those with whom I have served most closely: our administrators, first Hazel Harwood and now Marian Izzard, and our Development Workers, Rev Paul Wilson and then Rev Derek Balsdon.

For me, this journey with MET has been marked by significant milestones in my own family life. Six months after becoming Chair in 2013, I married Sarah, who has served at my side throughout, often at great personal cost. We have since welcomed our three daughters into the world, and have had the unique privilege of charting the growth of our family through the pages of MET's magazine, sharing photos of our newly born children over the years.

TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE

It is an honour to have been appointed as an Ambassador for MET:Revive from January 2025. I look forward to supporting the ongoing work of our movement, particularly through 'on the ground' ministry. Please do join us, if you can, for my final engagement as Chair: our annual Prayer Conference, 15 – 17 November 2024 in Northampton (link.metrevive.uk/gathering), and my first as Ambassador: the MET SW Conference, 24 – 26 January 2025 in Torquay (link.metrevive.uk/METSW25).

The gentle whispers of providence over all these years still ring in my ears. We cannot choose the times in which we live or the challenges we must face; ours is to choose to serve the Lord faithfully, at his call, in the present age. It is an age calling once again for rediscovery, reform and revival. Let's put our hands to the plough with joyful confidence. 'The best of all: God is with us!'

Thank you for our partnership in the gospel over these years. May the Lord bless you richly in all that lies ahead,

REV DR DAVID A. HULL,

The outgoing Chair of MET, is a Methodist Minister, currently serving as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol, a Free Methodist Church in Kingswood.

