

THE METHODIST CHURCH – NORTHAMPTON DISTRICT**Minutes of District Synod (Representative Session) held on 27 April 2024
at Marlborough Road Methodist Church, Banbury**

District Chair : The Rev'd Canon Helen D Cameron BA, MPhil, MCSP
Synod Secretary : Paul Spray

Welcome

Rev'd David Alderman, Superintendent Minister, and the Mayor Cllr Fiaz Ahmed welcomed Synod to Banbury. The Chair presented the Mayor with a statue of John Wesley riding a horse.

Worship

Rev'ds Chris Eddy and Robert Jones led opening worship.

Rev'd Nathan Falla, and a group of musicians, led the singing both during this worship and throughout the meeting.

Opening business

Scrutineers were appointed from the Oxford Circuit.

Attendance: The Synod was held in hybrid format with 100 members on site and some 50 attending online.

Full or partial dispensations had been granted to the Rev'ds Karen Beecham, Jason Cooke, Ian Griffiths, Paula Hunt, Kate Strange and Keith Underhill.

Apologies had been received from 19 supernumerary ministers and lay members of the Synod.

Deaths

The Synod noted the deaths since the last representative session of the Synod of the Rev'd Peter Brooks, Rev'd Donald Wilkes, and Joyce Hearn, former Synod Secretary. Synod gave thanks in prayer for their life and service.

Letters of greeting were sent to Rev'd Raymond Garfoot and Ingrid Garfoot, Michael and Christine Brittin, Rev'd Brian Lewis and Judith Lewis, Ruth Hilton and Rev'd Rob Hilton.

Memorials to Conference: None had been submitted.

Report of the District Executive

The Synod Secretary referred to his written report on the work of the District Executive, and drew attention to the other [Reports to Synod](#) on the District website.

Nominations

The District Executive brought to the Synod for approval the following nominations:

- Revds Kate Strange and David Alderman as Acting Co-Chairs from June 10th until no later than July 31st 2024, to cover the period between the current Chair leaving the District and the designated Chair, the Revd Dr Sonia Hicks, taking up her role.
- Revd Karen Beecham as District Probationers' Secretary.
- Rev Ian Suttie as Lead Ecumenical Officer.
- Sue Barratt as a member of Finance & Grants Committee.
- Derek Beaumont as Methodist Governor of Christ the Sower Church School, Milton Keynes.

All these nominations were unanimously approved.

The Chair thanked the Revd Ruth Simpson for her warm and generous care as District Probationers' Secretary. Ill health had forced her to relinquish both this role and her active ministry. Synod sent a letter of greeting.

Cease to meet for worship

The District Executive recommended to the Synod that the following two churches cease to meet for worship, whilst emphasising that the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church in those regions would continue:

- The Avenue, in the High Wycombe Circuit
- Wootton Trinity, in the Northampton Circuit,

These recommendations were approved unanimously, and the Chair offered a prayer of thanks for the work and witness of both churches.

Possible Kingsthorpe LEP

Rev'd David Spiers and Rev'd Samantha Gillard explained to Synod the circumstances leading to the wish to create a Methodist-Baptist Local Ecumenical Partnership at Kingsthorpe in the Northampton Circuit: eight years ago, the Methodist congregation had been unable to use their building for health and safety reasons, and had been welcomed to worship at the Baptist Church. This had led to joint mission, and the wish to join together. It was hoped to bring a formal proposal to Synod in the autumn.

Synod gave warm encouragement for the formation of an LEP in Kingsthorpe.

Stationing

Sue Walters, District Lay Stationing Representative, reminded members of the stationing briefing from 10am to noon on Tuesday 21st May, which involved ministers are expected to attend. She drew attention to the amended Code of Practice, and the requirement for Circuit Invitation Committee members to attend unconscious bias training.

District Executive membership

Dr Hellen Okello and Rev'd Edson Dube were elected to the District Executive. The Chair thanked all who had put their names forward.

Synod sang *Earth's creator* (StF 45)

Number of lay representatives at Synod

The Synod Secretary outlined that it was for each District to decide how many lay representatives Circuits sent to Synod. The District Executive was proposing to link it to the number of members in each Circuit. After some debate, Synod agreed that

Circuits may send one lay representative to Synod for the nearest 100 members, rounded upwards, except that no Circuit has less than three.

The Chair emphasised that it is very possible for others to attend Synod as guests, at the Chair's invitation. This is particularly useful for persons considering whether to put themselves forward as Synod members.

Methodist Council

Dr Hellen Okello referred Synod to her written report on the Council's work. She then explained that the Council was being replaced by a Connexional Council, and outlined the differences between the two bodies – see the attached slide.

Synod sang *Speak, O Lord* (StF 161)

Pastoral address

Rev'd Canon Helen D Cameron, gave a Pastoral Address, on the occasion of her final Synod as Chair of the District. The text of the Address is attached to these Minutes.

It was followed by a reflective conversation in groups, asking ourselves “ What have you learned personally about the love of God in your life, and when, or where, or in who did you last see the light of Christ shine?”

Synod sang *Here on the threshold* (StF 684)

A retiring collection was taken in aid of the World Mission Fund appeal for Gaza; £434 was collected in the church, whilst those online had been invited to donate directly.

Marking the Chair's appointment as President of Conference, and her final Synod

Rev'd David Alderman, Deputy Chair, addressed Synod. He noted that the District would be formally marking the Chair's departure at her leaving service on Sunday 9th June, at Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford. But the District wanted both to wish her well as she takes up the Presidency of Conference, and to mark this final Synod. He presented her with a bag to carry round the Connexion, and invited her to cut two cakes. Circuits then offered greetings in a series of videos.

A break was taken for lunch

Synod sang *Love Divine* (StF 503)

Update by the District Mission Team

Matt Forsyth referred Synod to his report, and welcomed Naomi Ensor as the District Digital Mission Enabler. Naomi defined digital mission as “reaching out, and connecting, to communities online, sharing the good news of Jesus’s love with an ever-growing digital community.” In a recent survey, 33% of church people said they had first found their church online. She offered a range of services that she could provide:

- training, online or in person, tailored to a circuit’s needs.
- a 30 minute online clinic on something specific a circuit wanted to ask about.
- webinars of an hour on particular “how to” topics
- resources, including graphics, templates and “how to” videos
- a digital community of practice on Facebook, for people in the District working online.

She had prepared a social media strategy, and updated the District website.

Matt and Naomi commended both the “Love is” programme, for which materials would be available in the summer; and “Origin”, an ecumenical young adults weekend in June.

Justice-Seeking Church

The Synod Secretary introduced the **Let’s End Poverty campaign** from the Joint Public Issue Team, and invited churches to question all election candidates on what they would do to end poverty. The Chair encouraged churches to display a Let’s End Poverty banner (available from [here](#))

Rev’d Nina Johnson spoke about the **situation in Myanmar**. 2.7 million people have been displaced, and at least 8,000 killed, as the military attack villages. The Methodist church is strong in Myanmar, and asks for prayer and support. She recommended the [JPIT blog on Myanmar](#), and suggested writing to MPs calling for sanctions, and offering support. She would be happy to provide details.

The Chair prayed for these situations, and **Synod agreed to send a greeting to the President of Conference of the Methodist Church of Upper Myanmar.**

Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

Regina Owusu briefed Synod on the work of the JDS group, which had met four times and has the aim to encourage, motivate and inspire churches in the District. God has a transforming, reckless and overwhelming love for humankind, and we have to share that. There are [JDS resources](#) on the District website, with prayers linked to a calendar of events. She noted that we are all unconsciously biased, and need to become conscious of that. The group is keen to support training, and has established links to each circuit. A District JDS event is planned for 2025.

Synod sang [Summoned by the God \(StF 690\)](#)

Safeguarding

The Chair welcomed Sally Wan, District Safeguarding Officer, who had started work in January. Sally explained that her colleague Neil, who had also started in January, was concerned with delivering safeguarding training; all other safeguarding matters fell to her. She was currently identifying what were the needs of the District, and would bring a strategic plan of action in the autumn. The Chair thanked her, not least for her steadiness, calm and approachability.

Ministers leaving the District

The Chair noted that Rev'ds Lesley Dinham, Fred Ireland, Elizabeth Morris, Israel Selvanayagam and Ruth Simpson would be sitting down by the end of the Connexional year, and that Rev'ds Helen Bell, Ian Griffiths, Paula Hunt, Nicola Vidamour and Helen White would also be leaving the District. The Chair offered prayers of thanks, and for guidance in the roads ahead.

Greetings from the incoming Chair

Synod watched a video of greetings from the Rev'd Dr Sonia Hicks, looking forward to joining the District, and chairing its next Synod.

Closing Eucharist

The Chair presided over a closing Eucharist.

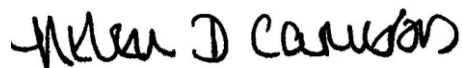
*Synod concluded by singing **Thou God of truth and love (StF 620)***

Next meetings

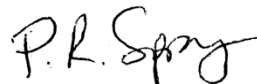
Autumn Representative Synod – 7th September 2024 at Brackley.

Spring Representative Synod – 10th May 2025, in the Leicester Trinity circuit.

Thanks were expressed to all those who had played a part in the organisation of the Synod.



Rev'd Helen D Cameron
District Chair



Paul Spray
Synod Secretary

PASTORAL ADDRESS

Rev'd Canon Helen D Cameron, Chair of the Northampton District and President-elect of Conference

Beloved,

In 1 John 3 we read these words

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.”

A poem called Reluctance by Robert Frost begins,

Out through the fields and the woods
 And over the walls I have wended;
 I have climbed the hills of view
 And looked at the world, and descended;
 I have come by the highway home,
 And lo, it is ended.

Over the last 7 years I have journeyed the length and breadth of this District but that journey is just about at an end as we prepare to welcome the Revd Dr Sonia Hicks as our next Chair. I have indeed wended my way through the District with utter joy and now that journeying is shortly to end.

I came reluctantly but willingly to be Chair of the Northampton District. I came because I was needed, because someone had to come when the District was without a Chair with less than 4 months warning before the next connexional year, with no opportunity for the shadowing of stationing, to one of the 4 large Districts. I felt I could be useful rather than that I was inspired or called to be a Chair. The only voice I heard was mine saying to the Secretary of the Conference and the Connexional Secretary when we were discussing the problem - I'll go if you need me to. Much later I heard the voice of God saying through others, “I have called you by name, you are mine”

Then I fell in love with the Northampton District. Love come unbidden and unexpectedly. Love is a gift.

There were 23 Circuits, 23 Superintendent colleagues, 23 Circuit Leadership Teams, no deputy Chairs and no history of deputies or assistants. In my first year I conducted 23 Ministerial Development reviews for Superintendents because they asked me to do that. I came to know and admire and indeed love the people (the saints of God on the ground as I often called them), and the places, the diversity and the beauty, rural, suburban, diverse buzzing inner cities, market towns galore, thatched cottages, industry, pork pies, cheese, universities, new housing estates, the roundabouts and the ecumenical courage of Milton Keynes , and bookshops galore The river Nene (pronounced Nen) in Northampton that becomes the River Nene (pronounced Neen) in Peterborough. Red kites galore overhead, chapels by streams, the beauties of so many places and people. We found good ways of working. We have known love and grace and been blessed by God.

I am not the first person in Methodism to approach something reluctantly. John Wesley, we are told in his journal, went reluctantly and with a heavy heart to attend a group meeting that evening in a Moravian meeting house (the Fetter Lane Society) on Aldersgate Street in London. It was there, while someone was reading from Martin Luther's Preface to the Letter to the Romans, that he felt that his heart was "strangely warmed".

He describes it like this:

I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

An ordained priest of the Church of England, son of the vicarage, devout undergraduate, a college tutor, a missionary in Georgia John learned something new about the nature and ways of God. John Wesley learned that God sometimes surprises us, and that surprise, that experience, can bring great joy. I have been given so much by this District and joy is one of the things I have been surprised by and have learned could be mine here in this District. One of Mary Oliver's poems says that we should allow ourselves to be surprised by joy, and that when we are, we should not hesitate to grasp that joy, for joy she says, is not meant to be a crumb. God, in and through you, has given me so much more than crumbs of joy.

Mary Oliver the poet is a constant companion of mine, and in another of her poems Among the Trees, she makes it sound simple, that which we are called to. I think it isn't at all simple but in the simplicity she hints at something profound which is that our calling, our vocation as individuals and as a community of grace and truth is to recognise the presence of God among us, around us, alive in the world, and because of that presence – to be glad.

She says,

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.

I would almost say that they save me,
and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness,
and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again,

"It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come into the world
to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine."

Stay awhile, she says, you have come into the world like the trees, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine and to bow often. Such an understanding comes from a true understanding of the nature of God, the world and what it is to be human. She is, I think, encouraging us to be filled with awe about the goodness of God and the love God has which holds all things together and gives us life

You probably know the story about John Wayne, the American actor. A star of countless Western films mainly playing cowboys in 1965 he was cast as the Centurion in the film, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. He had one line, he had to look up at the crucified Jesus and say, "Truly this man was the son of God". The director George Stevens urged the actor who drawled his line to add "more awe". John Wayne is reputed to have delivered the line a second time,

"Aaaw! Truly this man was the son of God".

So, in the seven years of serving you as your Chair what have I learned from you?

I have learned that the Christian faith is about more than a collection of beliefs and certain behaviours; I have learned that to follow Christ is to enter a mystery that sinks its roots into the essence of our lives, individually and in community. The mystery is not complicated but it is challenging. The mystery we must enter is to accept the truth that God is love. We may feel that is a cliché but in ancient times God was to be feared, God was all powerful, God was crafty and entered bargains. We believe that not only is God loving, but that God is love itself.

The love that is God is a crucified and costly love. We can know the depth of the mystery of love because God sent his Son into the world so that we might live through him. The cross of Jesus shows us that the love which gives its life for our life is love that is generously, ceaselessly, relentlessly, scandalously poured out. In not holding back, or hesitating to give itself up this love is the life-giving mystery because there can be no greater love than this.

What a wonder it is to have learned that we are each of us called into friendship with the risen Jesus. "I have called you friends, you did not choose me, I chose you".

This wonder should make us filled with awe and amazement- we are called into friendship with God not because we are wonderful, not because we do wonderful things but out of the depth of the love that is the divine mystery revealed in the cross and the empty tomb. We are called into friendship with God and then held in an abiding with God through love. A friend of mine has always said the history of the Church with all its conflicts and burning of heretics and exclusions of anyone who didn't comply would have been very different if instead of painting the 10 commandments on the walls of churches we had written, I have called you friends"! If we look at the Society of friends – the Quakers we find a radically inclusive community of people who are peace makers and reconcilers. We are invited to be friends with God, and with one another in a community of grace and truth. We are called to be friends to the friendless.

We cannot love God if we do not love one another whatever we try to assert. We love God only by loving our neighbour in the same manner as Jesus loves us and laid down his life for us. We are called to love both friend and enemy, loving those we disagree with and those who don't agree with our way of doing things.

We are called to lay our lives down for one another in ways that might be dramatic but also in ways that are quite ordinary, in acts of sacrifice and in acts of gratitude, in quiet patience, in honesty and truth bearing, in acts of forbearance and generosity. This is what I have witnessed in you, in this District. We are invited to delete the email we enjoyed writing but which we know we should never send because it is not loving, it is all about what we want and God's love is absent from it. For whoever does not love does not know God.

I have learned that we live our love out from the community created by the Spirit of God- the church. I have learned that we are called to a universal and generous love of both friend and enemy, and we live that love from the heart of the church. The Spirit of God is quite unlike us, we who tend to cluster with those who look and sound like us. The Spirit of God shows no partiality and calls people like us and others very unlike us but calls us to be one, an unlikely and motley crew of those who love God. Look around you- these are some of the people with whom God has called you into friendship with in Christ, through the waters of baptism, men and women and those who are non-binary. Old and young, black and white, brown and yellow, gay and straight, those born in Britain and those who have enriched us by coming to join us from across the globe. If we lack confidence in most things, we can be confident that we know this one thing - the God who is love has called each of us into his crucified love.

So these are the things we must continue to learn and live by:

God is love,
 the love that is God is a costly and crucified love.
 We are called to friendship with the risen Jesus.
 We cannot love God if we do not love one another.
 We live our love out from the community created by the Spirit.

We need to believe it, and live it, as if our lives depended on it. Because it does.

If we can believe it, and live it and share it with others, if we can bow before God often in awe because we recognise the love that is God present in another even as, or especially, when we disagree about something. When we meet the risen Christ in a particular place, in a community, in an action, in a relationship - then dear friends, we can go easy,
 we will be filled with light and we will all shine to the glory of God.

Thank you for reflecting the love of God to me. Thank you for shining. Don't stop.
 Amen.

THE METHODIST COUNCIL COMPARED WITH THE NEW CONNEXIONAL COUNCIL

Methodist Council (with a Strategic Resource Committee)	Connexional Council (with a Resourcing Committee)
Large: Up to 55 voting members	Lean: Up to 22 trustees
Meets 3 times per year; 1 in person and 2 virtual	Meets 6 times a year, 1 or 2 in person

Composed of persons nominated as representatives of the District and the Connexional Team, plus observers	Composed of persons formally interviewed and appointed on the basis of skills, experience and expertise
Agenda dictated by the papers produced by the Connexional Team	Has a more definitive control of the agenda
Policy-making powers but no executive authority. Employs Connexional Team.	Policy-making powers and executive authority. Employs Connexional Team
Exercises general oversight of the Connexional Team	Legally responsible for the general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church
Reporting annually to Conference	Reporting both to the Conference and (as a charity trustee body) to the Charity Commission
4 sub-committees	3 sub-committees