

Chair's Pastoral Letter

5th May 2010

To all Members of Synod

Dear Colleagues,

I am glad to say that I have arrived back in Britain – with all the group who went on the Pilgrimage – and all are safe and well! I was sorry not to be at Synod, conscious that not only had I missed the business of Synod but also the many conversations I have with you during the day, conversations that I value highly. I am also aware of the extra work it meant, especially for Derrick and Brenda, and I am grateful to them.

You, the members of Synod, are the key leaders of the Methodist Churches across the District, and I am very aware of the commitment, sacrifice and faithfulness that mark out the service that you give to the Church. We face difficult and uncertain times as churches; challenges of finance and personnel mean we have to consider carefully how we best deploy the God-given resources of our churches. Across the District courageous decisions have been made to come together as circuits, to change the way we run circuits to make use of the opportunities larger circuits give us and you have been at the vanguard of these decisions. In some places within the District, such as in the Black Country, careful negotiations continue which are enabling new possibilities to open up for us. I am hugely grateful to you for this work.

I am clear however that this same spirit of courageous leadership is required of us all as we attempt to take the Church forward with a renewed commitment to mission. I look forward to the day when we can truly say that each of our churches is a centre of Mission where the Gospel is taken out into the community in which it is placed – and that we are making a difference for God's Kingdom. This needs a willingness to embrace new ventures in Mission and both Jeff Reynolds and Paul Trenberth are in the District Team to help churches and circuits to grasp these openings as they arise, or to stimulate the opportunities when nothing otherwise lies as an opening for us.

Today I spent some time with those who work as Chaplains to Commerce and Agriculture and we shared some of the challenges of responding to the issues of social justice around us in modern society. Their voice, heard at Synod, reminds us of a world where the issues of justice, human dignity and hope need to be addressed as in previous times. They call us out of our buildings into a Wesley-like spirit of courageous relevant evangelism. As I was unable to say these things at Synod, I wanted to express them to you in this letter.

May I remind you of the Ordinands' Testimony Service, 7-30pm on Friday 11th June at Dudley Port Methodist Centre where Ken Gowland, our ordinand, will be joined by ministers retiring in what I hope will be a wonderful evening.

You will, I am sure, be delighted to hear that Tim Flowers and Heather Wilson were both accepted by the Connexional Candidates Committee for training as Presbyters. We hold them in our prayers.

I am very concerned that we have as yet been unable to find a District Treasurer to follow Moira. We are looking for someone who will act as an "executive treasurer" rather than hands on work with money. We are also looking for a Local Preachers' Tutor and a Treasurer for the Fund for Presbyters and Deacons. If you can suggest people for these posts I would be very grateful.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Howard". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John Howard