

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

24:06:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Over the last few days I've been preparing for the Annual Methodist Conference by reading through the numerous agenda items that will be placed before us and assiduously checking the Stations that will be agreed at the closing session. In the light of the viral pandemic we are meeting virtually over the Zoom platform so that we can still confer, make necessary decisions and deal with essential business. It is far from ideal but strange times require strange measures and this is and has been a fact of life for all of us in the present crisis.

During the Conference, it will be noted that it is 200 years since the Wesleyan Conference met in Liverpool and passed a series of resolutions on pastoral work that have been influential ever since and came to be known as 'The Liverpool Minutes'. For those of you who are interested to do so - they can be found on page 71 in Book V, Part 3 in Volume One of CPD under the title 'The Liverpool Minutes 1820'. I commend this to you as they are well worth reading not simply for historical interest but because of their continuing relevance. The resolutions on ministry and pastoral work were framed as a response to numerical contraction and with a renewed desire to refocus priorities in order to renew the effectiveness of the church in ministry and mission.

It could be argued that in the present crisis and particularly as we emerge into a new post-covid landscape the Church faces a unique opportunity to rethink and reimagine its future life and shape. It is not really an option to think that things can simply return to how they were; instead it is very likely that certain things will be relinquished but new things will emerge – our whole way of life and how we relate to one another and the wider world is under question. This is a situation in which we are all being changed and we cannot pretend to be immune from that fact.

In Section Two of the Liverpool Minutes the resolutions remind us that if there is to be any renewal of God's work through the life of the Church that bears God's witness in the world then that must also be a renewal of ourselves – it begins in each one of us:

'Let us take care that, whatever other qualifications we may acquire and use, our ministry shall at least be always marked by sound, evangelical doctrine, by plainness of speech, and by a spirit of tender affection and burning zeal.'

As a contemporary Methodist I take this to mean that the ministry we exercise as God's people will be thoroughly grounded in the scriptures and tradition of the church as we seek to herald the good news of the Kingdom of God in Christ crucified and risen. We seek ever to do this *plainly* – in ways that are relevant, contextual and real for the people of today. We do all of this with a tender kindness and an optimism of grace that values every person made in the Image of God. Finally we do this with one enduring *telos* in mind; to love God and neighbour with all our heart, mind, spirit and strength. This vision *cannot* fail to transform us and it just might transform others too!

With Peace and Blessings, Julian