

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

Autumn 2023

Dear Friends,

Many of you will be aware that Autumn coincides with the Methodist process of stationing, when Chairs of District meet together in the Stationing Matching Group, to make matches between prospective ministers and circuit appointments. This can be an anxious time, for both Circuits and Ministers, particularly at a time in the life of the Church, where there are not enough ordained resources to meet the needs of the Circuits.

Now that SMG 1 has been concluded, I am at liberty to share with you my personal news, regarding my future plans. I have been stationed to the Aire and Calder Circuit, in the Yorkshire West District, where I will have pastoral charge of three churches and responsibility for developing a Creative Arts Project based at Newmillerdam. The Lakeside Creative Arts Project is a Circuit project that will transform an existing methodist chapel into a centre for the arts – providing gallery space for art and a hub for other arts; such as poetry, music and performing arts. There is a small worshipping community that will continue to meet in this space. We shall be living in Sandal Magna, a suburb due south of Wakefield and Leeds.

As I reflect upon this new appointment and this new context, I am reminded of the wisdom and mystery of God's calling. I note that my own interest in the arts has been a lifelong passion – I have always had a deep love of literature, poetry, music, and theatre. These are mediums, that at their best, disclose beauty, truth, and goodness; and when we engage with them deeply, they offer moments of epiphany and transcendence. I now have an opportunity to channel this passion and interest in particular ways, as a minister of Word and Sacrament.

I also note with some interest the seeming circularity of this new chapter – I am returning to a part of the world where I completed my secondary education at Ackworth Quaker School. I am returning to a District in which I once served and to a context that was instrumental in shaping my vocation to be a District Chair. It was here that I observed the gracious oversight of the late, Revd. Dr. Liz Smith, former Chair of the Leeds District, who combined pastoral warmth, with deep intelligence and wisdom. Throughout these years, she became my mentor and inspiration. I shall also be serving in a Circuit where my father once exercised the role of Superintendent Minister in the 1980's – admittedly in a different and much smaller circuit in those days!

As I ponder the mysterious unfolding of God's providence, I find myself drawn to the words of T. S. Elliot and his *magnum opus*, *The Four Quartets*. Towards the close of this work, in the fourth quartet (Little Gidding), we read these words:

**'With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.'**

With peace and blessing, Julian