Newcastle upon Tyne Methodist District

SYNOD DIGEST SEPTEMBER 2025

LOVING GOD... SERVING PEOPLE... MAKING DISCIPLES...

WELCOME TO SYNOD

Rev Jona Sewell, Chair of the District welcomed everyone to Synod, which was held at Westerhope Methodist Church. At our previous two Synods we had considered 'Being rooted in the vine' and 'Fruitfulness'. Jona continued this theme as we considered 'Connectedness'.

This was very well illustrated by Rev Stuart Earl, Assistant Chair of District, who led our opening worship.

The Faroes are a remote archipelago in the North Atlantic. Seemingly isolated from each other, the islands are interconnected by a system of underground road tunnels. These links are invisible on the surface but enable each small community to belong fully to something bigger, and to be resourced and involved in a fruitfulness which otherwise would be unreachable.

Can this picture speak into our gathering today? Seemingly isolated and restricted, we come to interconnect in ways of which others are often unaware, but which can make all our lives more fruitful.

Jona reminded us that we are rooted and nourished in God and our purpose is to bear fruit. We are branches, connected to the vine and therefore connected to each other. We are structurally connected – churches, Circuits, District and Connexion. But, there is no 'them' and 'us'. There is only 'us', all wanting what is best for the Kingdom of God. One body, many parts, but moving in harmony together to the heartbeat of God. What binds us together is much more important that what divides us.

NEW APPOINTMENTS AND VACANCIES

District payroll and pensions is now being administered by Donna Garland following the retirement of David Stabler at the end of August. Donna is based at Cornerstones, in Chester-le-Street.

Synod agreed that Rev Steve Jakeman, the new Ecumenical Officer and Susan Cassidy, the new District Missional Property Manager should be members of the appropriate District Committees.

The District Probationers' Committee has oversight of any probationer minister in the District. It is made up of both lay and ordained members but currently two new lay members are needed. Expressions of interest are invited from anyone who has a heart for supporting those still in ministerial training, and particularly from people with a background in education or HR. For further information please contact Rev Jane Cook, Committee Secretary - revjanecook@gmail.com.

As previously notified, we need a new District Treasurer. A role description is available and can be obtained from Diane in the District Office at admin@newcastlemethodistdistrict.org. If you would like a conversation about what's involved, please ask and we would be happy to have those conversations.

There are other opportunities to use your skills and gift across the District, just get in touch with Jona, Stuart or Christine if you are interested in any of the opportunities mentioned.

METHODIST HOMES

Fiona Dowson, the Area Support Chaplain, spoke to us about the range of services MHA offers, ie 77 care homes, 65 supported living schemes with around 5,000 individuals being supported in some way. Chaplains are available to most clients and they provide a listening ear, one-to-one support and pastoral care.

As well as giving thanks for the Church's support, prayer and encouragement, Fiona told a couple of stories which illustrated how important and impactful chaplaincy work can be. So often there is a very real sense of God being present in these situation.

CONNECTED BY A BALL OF WOOL!

Rev Elaine Lindridge interviewed two lay employees working in Shieldfield, Adam Wilkinson and Josh Simpson. Shieldfield Art Works and the Shieldfield Project received a grant from the District Advance Fund. As well as updating Synod on how the work was going, Elaine took the opportunity to illustrate the many connections needed to get such a project off the ground and to continue supporting it.

A ball of wool was thrown between those involved in planning and discernment, approving the grant, managing and supporting the lay employees, coaching, linking with the Mother House and other pioneers. This illustrated the network of support and the many connections made.

RECOVERY CHURCH

Deacon Tracey Hume, Recovery Church Coordinator, spoke of the spiritual thirst many participants have. During Holy Week Tracey and Jon had the enormous privilege of baptising 7 of the Recovery Church family and celebrating the reaffirmation of baptism for 3 others.

This took place in the sea at Cullercoats Bay as they all wanted full immersion to signify a new start.

Tracey is also working for the Connexion and several places are looking to set up Recovery Church, which shows how widespread addiction is. They were asked to contribute to the Hope and Anchor programme at Greenbelt. Five participants from Newcastle were willing to give up their anonymity to model a service and to talk about RC. Around 150 people attended both sessions and many stories were shared.

If you would like to know more about Recovery Church, or if you would like to consider offering financial support, then please contact Tracey at deacontraceyhume@gmail.com.

DISTRICT MISSION PLAN

Jona explained the latest version of the District Mission Plan which is intended to be a live document, helping Circuits and churches to focus on the calling of the Methodist Church to be Growing, Inclusive, Evangelistic and Justice-Seeking. Jona or Stuart, together with another member of the District Leadership Team, would like to support Circuits and churches by visiting each Circuit annually to be part of local mission planning discussions.

REINVITATION OF REV STUART EARL

Because of a Conference decision this year, Stuart's reinvitation as Assistant Chair of District had to be undertaken over the summer. The District Policy Committee were happy to invite Stuart for a further 3 years from September 2026. This was endorsed by Synod but is contingent on the outcome of a review of the post which will be conducted early in 2026.