

District Report from Spring Synod 2016

Despite the fact that some of us woke up to a cold, snowy morning, the weather soon improved and we enjoyed synod in Blessed William Howard Catholic High School in Stafford, hosted by the Stafford Circuit. Their thorough preparation meant that synod ran smoothly. We began with worship led by the circuit and a welcome from Pauline Salter, the Superintendent Minister, followed by warm civic greetings from Cllr Peter Jones, Mayor of Stafford. Synod remembered Revd Elaine Woolley, who had died since the last synod and Revd T John Davies, who died suddenly just a few days before this synod. Members of synod stood in respect as John Howard prayed for them and their families.

Routine business included the reception of the District Accounts, the appointment/election of district officers and committee members, the introduction of a new resource DVD based on 'Being Good News', a district event during the visit of the President, a presentation about the District Children's Holiday, a celebration of two candidates accepted to train as Presbyters and two ordinands. An ordinands testimony service will be held at 7 pm on Friday 10th June in Upper Gornal Methodist Church. Amanda Quinn thanked the district for helping her reach her regional fundraising target for AFC.

There were three high points in synod:

A. Focus Groups

It was Revd John Howard's final synod in the district and he chose to 'review the situation' by identifying 10 areas of development/initiatives that had been addressed during his years as our Chair of District. These were:

- Participation – everyone included – young, ethnic minorities, seniors, disabled, gay, 30-50 year-olds, etc.
- Komera – the way forward
- Focus on growth – Churches looking at themselves. In what ways are they open to new people
- Mission Action Planning – Equipping churches for mission and identifying how to do it
- Justice and Peace – Israel/Palestine
- Fair-Trade and Ethics – What is the position now and where do we go from here?
- Mapping the way forward in mission – Bigger, fewer circuits, how do we grasp opportunities?
- Safeguarding - How do we change the culture within the church to embrace safeguarding and change attitudes.
- Supervision – of Ministers and employees
- City of Sanctuary (unfortunately cancelled due to a family bereavement)

Each group ran twice, so that each synod member was able to choose 2 focus areas. Thanks are due to all those who facilitated these groups. Each group identified Actions Points as a guide to the way forward. These will be circulated separately.

B. Notices of Motion

Three were proposed.

- The first was for the attention of synod and concerned the current refugee crisis, proposed by Revd Chris Collins, seconded by Mr Denis Beaumont. The following was agreed by the synod:

'The district synod meeting in its representative session asks the District Council to ensure that provision is made by identifying an individual or group of people to enable local churches in the district to respond to the current refugee crisis. This could include, but not be limited to:

- *collating and sharing stories of refugees met by local churches, how local churches are already making an impact and how other local churches can support them.*

- *advising churches how they can make an impact locally, ecumenically, nationally and internationally.*
- *encouraging local churches to lobby Her Majesty's Government to ensure all is being done to alleviate the crisis in ways that enable refugees to find sanctuary.'*

- **Notice of Motion 2 is a Memorial to Conference** and was agreed as follows:

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Synod, Representative Session (Present 117, Voting for 106, against 0) welcomes the statement of the Conference of European Churches urging support for European Parliament Resolution on arms export (17 December 2015) and on the humanitarian situation in Yemen (25 February 2016) which includes an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia. We urge Conference to endorse this statement, and:

- i direct the Secretary of Conference to write to Her Majesty's Government calling for the cancellation of arms exports contracts to the Middle East in line with the legally binding criteria of the EU Common Position 944/2008/CFSP.
- ii authorise the Joint Public Issues Team to monitor the situation and make representations accordingly.
- iii encourage local churches to engage with this action and request the connexion to provide resources to enable this.

Proposed: Denis Beaumont

Seconded: Revd Christopher Collins

Appendix: CEC Statement dated 21 March 2016

CEC urges support for resolution on arms export, arms embargo

In its commitment to Europe as a whole and seeking to promote an authentic, credible and socially responsible Christian witness, CEC urges strong support for European Parliament resolutions on arms export of 17 December 2015 and on the humanitarian situation in Yemen of 25 February 2016 including arms embargo against Saudi Arabia.

CEC constantly monitors developments regarding production, export and the use of weapons at European and international levels, especially in light of the Arms Trade Treaty(ATT) adopted by the UN General Assembly 2013.

Arms exports play a significant role in violent conflicts, as is the case in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. There is a strong link between arms exports and wars being prolonged. The heart-breaking images of refugees fleeing on a daily basis and the gross violation of human rights in many parts of the Middle East cannot leave CEC member churches unmoved. It is into this context that CEC underlines the need for respecting the legally binding criteria of the EU Common Position 944/2008/CFSP and the ATT for the export of conventional weapons and for governments of EU Member States to ensure fuller transparency of their arms exports as well as the export of any sensitive technology.

CEC furthermore urges governments of EU Member States to evaluate the consequences of arms exports to the Middle East and to take steps to cancel existing agreements, if necessary. CEC strongly supports the EU in its endeavour to "ensure the consistency of its external activities as a whole in the context of its external relations, in order to promote democracy and the rule of law, prevent conflicts, eradicate poverty, foster intercultural dialogue, and maintain international stability and security."

CEC reiterates its commitment to work towards building a humane, social and sustainable Europe at peace with itself and its neighbours in which human rights and solidarity prevail.

Notice of Motion 3 is also a proposed **Memorial to Conference** and was agreed by synod as follows:

Circuits in tragedy and crisis

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 117, Voting: 117 for, 0 against) draws the attention of Conference to the small but seemingly growing number of circuits

facing the tragedy and crisis of one of their ministers in the active work dying suddenly or being diagnosed with critical illness and the impact this has on the circuit ministry team and the circuit as a whole.

We request that the Conference directs the Methodist Council through an appropriate means to consider the pastoral and practical implications of such situations, including speaking to those who have been through this, so that the experience can be gathered and guidance can be given to enable practice to be improved.

In particular, Synod is concerned that

- (a) minister(s), lay staff and circuit feel supported, valued and 'not forgotten' by the district and relevant Connexional officers as they go through the crisis and tragedy.
- (b) the spiritual and physical wellbeing of minister(s) and lay people who lead the circuit is safeguarded as they cope with their own grief and minister in the circuit, by ensuring space is provided for reflection and pastoral support.
- (c) care is taken that resources available to support those affected are reiterated to individuals and circuits, so that all, who would benefit from them, have access to them.

Proposer: Revd Nathan Falla

Secunder: Judith Wood

The two memorials have been sent to the Conference Memorials Committee.

C. Holy Communion

Synod gave good wishes and God's blessings to Revd Graham Sturdy who has moved to Australia, to Revds. Andrew Champley, Steve Singleton and Fiona Brown who are 'sitting down this year and to Deacon Annie Trembling who is leaving the district. Revd. David Lavender offered good wishes to Revd. John Howard at this his last synod and thanked him for his commitment to the District and its life and for his support to ministers, local churches and circuits.

We finished with a service of Holy Communion, celebrated by John Howard and fellowship over tea and cakes.

Please note that the next synod will be on Saturday 10th September 2016 in Trinity Methodist Church, Kidderminster.