

JUNE 2021 NEWSLETTER

from Rev Trevor Capstick

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Dear friends

I hope you are all well and enjoying the beautiful weather which for once has coincided with a Bank Holiday weekend and a school half-term week!

Later this month Rev Dave Charter, probationer minister in our Circuit, will be attending the Methodist Conference in Birmingham (more of that shortly) and will be ordained on Sunday June 27th at a service at Coventry Central Hall from 4pm. Please remember Dave in your prayers as he attends the ordinands' retreat prior to ordination, and as his family and friends gather to support him on that special Sunday.

GOD – who is beyond us, with us and in us

Last Sunday we celebrated Trinity Sunday and reflected on the mystery of God about whose being and reality our human words will always be inadequate. Indeed Rowan Williams says we must continually ask ourselves “What is the least silly thing we can say about God?” Recognizing the limitations of human words and concepts, the Christian Church developed over the years a belief that the creator God – always greater than us and beyond us – but known as Abba, Father- can nevertheless be seen uniquely in Jesus, the Word made flesh, as God with us. “God has a body language known as Christ” as Mark Oakley, another Anglican priest and writer, puts it. And God’s breath, the Holy Spirit, lives in us and creates community to grow and love in. The picture of the Trinity shows that not only are we a gift but that we can be a gift as others are to us.

I love the image of the waterfall with which Rowan Williams pictures our experience of this trinitarian God. Like us standing under a waterfall, the life of God is around us, soaking and overwhelming us. But we can’t grab it or hold on to it – we can’t contain it. As he says, our calling as Christians is “to go back again and again to stand under the waterfall...to be reborn in the truth of living in the real world, the world held eternally in the life of the Father, the Word (Son) and the Spirit “.

GOD IN LOVE UNITES US – the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group 2019 – Provisional resolutions to be voted on at the upcoming Methodist Conference 2021.

The several resolutions in this report have been voted on at all the Spring Synods of the British Methodist Church. The Newcastle Spring Synod voted in favour of each of the five resolutions to be brought before the Conference (June 25th-July 1st). According to reports in recent issues of the Methodist Recorder, virtually every other District Synod has voted in favour of these resolutions, albeit with some amendments in some cases. The most significant and controversial resolution is the one in which “the Conference consents in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises throughout the Connexion and by Methodist ministers, probationers or members in so far as the law of the relevant jurisdiction permits or requires...” Our District Synod voted in favour of this resolution by 107 votes to 38 against.

The other resolutions – on principles of good relating, on cohabitation, on the theological understanding of marriage to be printed in CPD and on amendments to Standing Orders in CPD – were all passed by higher majorities.

As our Chair of District has said, whatever the outcome at Conference, some people will be unhappy or upset. But we must seek to keep praying and hold one another in Christ’s love. If Conference accepts the same-sex marriage recommendation, then it will be up to individual Church Councils whether or not to register to allow same-sex marriage on their premises and for individual ministers to decide whether or not they wish to conduct a same-sex marriage. There will be no compulsion upon either a Church Council or minister to do so.

In a recent letter updating Synod reps on the decisions made at Synod, our District Chair cited Galatians 3:28 which affirms that “in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. It is a central text in a gospel of reconciliation. Grateful for the gracious spirit evident at Synod, he concluded that “my prayer is that, in a small way, our modelling of what it means to live together with contradictory convictions is a sign of Christ’s presence with us”.

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT: “ Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” (probably written by a 19th century writer Ian McClaren when asked by a religious weekly for a Christmas message).

