

# FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING REFLECTIONS ON SIX YEARS AS DEVELOPMENT WORKER

## BEGINNINGS....

Paul Smith preached as I was inducted into the new role of Development Worker for Methodist Evangelicals Together, at the Plymouth Methodist Conference in 2012. The words that spoke to me were, 'While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul (later Paul) for the work to which I have called them' (Acts 13:2). Unknown to Paul Smith, God had used those same words to help me to make the step to apply and then seek permission to be released by Conference to this post. It was affirmation that we (Karen and I) had taken the right step of faith in me leaving circuit ministry, to equip, encourage and support evangelicals in Methodism.

The role of Development Worker had been on the hearts of MET and predecessors for many years. Some have told me how it was a vision of the Revd Dr Donald English. It has been a privilege to be part of the ongoing ministry of MET around the connexion.

Thank you for your prayers during the last six years. At the start of teaching sessions or acts of worship, I often tell those gathered that they are being prayed for by people all around the connexion. Congregations and gatherings have been encouraged that they are part of a much larger family of MET and Methodism. I have relied on those prayers and Karen and the family join me in thanking you for your faithfulness.

The role has been financed by sacrificial giving of those in the MET family. We started in faith wondering if we had enough for a year or two. Despite treasurers giving conservative projections of cash flow, their faith in pressing on has resulted in six years of ministry and the role continuing.

What I share with you now, is a result of God answering your vision, your prayers, and your sacrificial giving. We give God all the praise and all the glory.

## MET IS A RENEWAL MOVEMENT....

It has taken several years for MET to develop the strapline which encapsulates our vision and purpose. We are a renewal movement! Over the years, I have seen hundreds of people renewed in their faith and ministry as they experience an anointing and filling with the Holy Spirit. Burnt out, faithful Christians have had the flame of the Spirit rekindled in their hearts. A recent weekend in Basingstoke brought the following feedback,

*'There has been real fruit already... it's been a real joy to chat to some folk, who have been relating how wonderful it is to feel God closer than they've felt before or for a long time. What a blessing to see these precious folk full of joy and peace, serving in the cafe in their faithful way but with fresh vision and loving energy.'*

*Deacon Marlene Skuce*

Perhaps the greatest blessing has been to see people experience the forgiveness

of God, being able to forgive themselves and experience that Jesus, 'breaks the power of cancelled sin.'

Seeing presbyters and deacons engage in prayer ministry, occasionally through tears, has been wonderful. People have been encouraged and equipped to fulfil their ministries and new ministries have emerged as they caught a vision of God's love for their communities.

## ...WHICH IS BIBLE-BASED

It has been a privilege to lead Local Preacher and Worship Leader training, Bible weekends, Church weekends, retreats and seminars at Cliff Festival and ECG. District Chairs have invited me to address Synods and lead training, ministry days and retreats. As MET partners you have put my name forward in church councils and circuit meetings and I have been welcomed across all the mainland Districts of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The evangelical teaching has provoked conversation and debate. Above all it has encouraged and supported people in their ministries. Thank you for releasing me to this preaching and teaching ministry.

It has been good to work with the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network, Consultation on Spirituality, Equality and Diversity groups within Methodism, plus EA and renewal networks across the denominations.

## ...AND PRAYER-FOCUSSED

Graham Horsley, at a seminar at ECG, reminded me of the example of my

mum, as a prayer warrior and faithful worshipper. Prayer has always been at the heart of my life and ministry, though it is feeble compared with many I encounter. This role has released me to continue to encourage prayer and prayer ministries in local churches, where prayer and renewal groups have emerged.

Tom Stuckey, Howard Booth and Rob Frost encouraged me to pursue a healing ministry. Many churches have taken up this opportunity. Prayer ministry teams have been established in local churches. We have stood back in amazement as God has ministered his healing touch. A text message has just been received,

*'You stepped out in faith to a deeper level in your healing ministry and I feel God is honouring your listening to him as you prayed specifically for me.... I am so thankful for your prayers and God's healing grace. The pain and stiffness settled over the following days.'*

## ENCOURAGED ...YET CHALLENGED

Six years of travelling the connexion have encouraged me. In her 2017 Presidential address, the Revd Loraine Mellor said, 'I know that I am part at present of a declining Church, but I am not part of a declining gospel.... Because you see, perhaps in my naivety, I don't believe that God is done with us just yet.' I affirm what Loraine said. I do believe that God has not finished with us, but we are required to heed his warning.

For me, the Methodist Church mirrors so much of the church in Ephesus. Born in a move of the Holy Spirit, with many accounts of healing and transformation, the church grew based on faithful teaching, pastoral care and oversight from a succession of godly leaders. However, when the risen Jesus spoke about the church in Ephesus, he gave a challenge. Jesus intimately knew the work of the Church in Ephesus as he 'walks among the seven golden lampstands' (Revelation 2:1). I think that we forget the risen Jesus' presence in worship, small groups, committees and church councils. To recognise his presence may change our expectations, conversations, and actions. Jesus knew about and praised the deeds, hard work, perseverance, testing of doctrine and practice, persecution, and lack of toleration with wickedness within the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:2-3,6).

The same applies today; Great ministries are happening all around the connexion,



reaching hundreds of thousands of people, through the hard work and perseverance of many faithful people. However, there is a big BUT in Jesus' loving critique of the church at Ephesus. The one who has intimate knowledge of the church, wants the church to pursue intimacy with him, 'Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love' (Revelation 2:4).

To remember is the first action we are called to take. Remember what we were like when we first came to faith. Remember how we loved God so much we spent time in the word and prayer. Remember how we went with eager expectation to worship. Remember the zeal and expectation in fulfilling God's calling on our lives. Remember that we loved God with our whole being and loved our neighbours so much that we not only met their physical, emotional and mental needs, we also shared with them the gospel to meet their spiritual needs. To repent is our response as we recall how far we have fallen from our first love. We must turn again to Jesus. The danger is that if we do not repent, 'I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place' (Revelation 2:5).

MET and the historic tributaries of Methodist Revival Fellowship, Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism and Dunamis, have been heeding the challenge of the risen Christ over the years. We have called the church back to its first love as:

- We uphold the authority of the Bible and the centrality of the cross.
- We pray for revival and spiritual renewal.
- We encourage evangelism through relationships, prayer and action.

Evangelicals seek to be the body of Christ in our communities being full of grace and truth. As we grow deeper in intimacy with God, we will grow in fellowship and mission, and God will add to our numbers those who are being saved.

As you read this, I will have returned to circuit ministry as Superintendent of the Liverpool (South) Circuit. I am looking forward to returning to day-to-day pastoral ministry and all the challenges that face the circuit. What I have written, challenges me as I embark on a new season of ministry. God has never let me down as I have pursued these principles throughout my ministry. May I assure you that he will not let you down either.

Thank you once again for your support in this season of my ministry. God has blessed me as he has outpoured his blessings around the connexion. I hope you will support whoever follows me in this role and welcome the gifts and graces they bring.

*Paul*

