



CALLED TO STAY

Chris & Nicola Briggs

PRESBYTERS NICOLA AND CHRIS BRIGGS CONSIDER WHY THEY ARE PREPARED TO STAY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH DESPITE RECENT DECISIONS OF THE METHODIST CONFERENCE.

As a couple we have prayed, struggled, talked, listened, cried, looked again at the Bible and have seriously tried to open ourselves to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us following the 2021 Methodist Conference.

Despite there being choppy waters in the Methodist Church of Great Britain for some of us, at present we have determined that we will do our best to stay within the fellowship of the Connexion. Why is this? There are a number of reasons and we have tried to express these in this article.

The prime reason in many ways is that we felt called by God to offer for the ordained Presbyteral Ministry in the Methodist Church and hold the view that once God has called us into something, we do not leave that calling until God makes it clear that we should. Neither of us has felt God leading us out of that calling and we trust that if that should be the case we will continue prayerfully to be open to the directing of the Holy Spirit.

We feel the incarnational principle of 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23) means that as far as possible we should seek to influence from the inside rather than from the side-lines. We acknowledge that for Jesus to come among us meant it would be messy and challenging for him but that transformation from within was an important spiritual and biblical principle. We would extend this by arguing that we are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Although Jesus was referring to followers being salt and light in the world, this is just as relevant to influence in the life of the church. There is a need for that which is good to be taught, preached, expressed and argued for when the church comes to points of controversy and difficult decision. If we withdraw the salt and light at that point we are almost colluding with the problems that arise.

Both of us have journeyed with the Conference over the years and indeed with other decision making places in the church in the area of human relating, and it feels important to retain the traditional evangelical voice at this crucial time as much as ever before. Over the years we have sought to speak up for the views we hold, and which we maintain are biblical, in these various places, even when what we have shared has not been popular.

We recognise that being a voice which feels to be in a minority can be a challenging and lonely place

sometimes. We understand though that, despite the traditional evangelical view on human identity and relationships not being entirely welcomed by parts of the Methodist Church, the reality is that across the church in this country and indeed the world, this is not a peculiar or minority view. The evangelical church is fulsome in its advocating of Scripture as the supreme rule for faith and practice and also the desire to ensure that biblical study is carried out in ways other than just relatively modern forms of criticism.

Having said that, we are aware that there will be occasions for all followers of Jesus when we will have to make a stand for biblical principles that others may not like or agree with. This might happen with those inside the church and with those outside. On such occasions we are reminded of the Old Testament prophets, many of whom found that the Word of God they offered was rejected. On such occasions their responsibility was to be faithful in speaking forth the Word even when it seemed no-one would listen. We choose to believe that, even when what we have to share is not popular, when we believe something is scripturally correct (under conviction but maintaining humility), we have a responsibility to express that. We can be part of God's prophetic voice.

We recognise that over the years, we have had opportunities to speak at Conference, and have felt on a number

of occasions prompted to speak on behalf of those whose evangelical voice is not always heard or who do not want to attend Conference. We hope and pray that more Methodist evangelicals would attend Conference and speak for biblical principles and seek to be at the heart of these decision making processes.

We are conscious that 'in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith' (Deed of Union). This does not mean it is easy, but in order to see the transformation of the people of this land we need to persevere with this honourable commission. It may be that this particular and specific mission of the Methodist Church will come to an end in God's timing but in the meantime we seek to do what we can to stand in that tradition.

Although we hold contradictory convictions with sisters and brothers in some parts of the Methodist Church, we acknowledge that when Jesus calls us and we respond, this puts us in relationship with each other. Whether

we agree with each other on every aspect of life and faith does not affect that relational status. This can be very hard, but spiritually we are still called to care for those who are part of Christ's church as they are for us. Therefore as far as possible we will try to maintain that sense of being in close relationship and trust that, as we encourage one another to grow closer to Jesus, so we will reflect better his life and characteristics and together be drawn into the will of God.

In all of this we try to keep prayer at the centre as we seek to discern what God is saying to us and how God is calling us to understand the Scriptures.

Nicola is a Presbyterian in the Borders Mission Circuit in the Nottingham and Derby District. Her background is in Youth and Community work and she has a Masters in Christian Leadership and Applied Theology. Born in Scotland, Nicola has lived in the southern part of England for most of her life. Her enthusiasms include going to the gym, reading, visits to the cinema and playing various musical instruments. She owns a small set of bagpipes but has not learned to play them yet.

Chris is a Presbyterian serving as District Mission Enabler for the Nottingham and Derby District and is also serving in a church in the Derby Circuit. An ex-Civil Servant, Chris spent his early years also volunteering on a local Radio Station where he hosted programmes, was Deputy Station Manager and looked after the Religious Programming content. Chris enjoys playing the guitar.

Nicola and Chris have three children and two grandchildren.

