

FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Revd Derek Balsdon



As I write this, I have a very different view out of the window than usual: the rolling hills of Devon rather than the flatter Cheshire plain. I am staying at my dad's home, so that I can visit him more easily while he is in hospital. With quite a bit of my MET work being online or desk based, I am able to continue serving MET while away from home. As lockdown restrictions have eased and churches are reopening to a new normal, numbers joining in with the weekly MET Bible studies and prayer meetings have dipped slightly, although with still more participants than would often attend Bible studies and prayer meetings at our churches. In the light of this, we are going to continue these online opportunities for fellowship for a while longer.

Part of my work has been supporting those who are struggling owing to the 2021 Methodist Conference decisions to approve same-sex marriage and cohabiting. I acknowledge that some MET Members (and many other Methodists) are content with the Conference decisions, and consider that we need to live with contrary convictions. I also acknowledge that numerous MET Members (and many other Methodists) do not feel able to live with these contrary convictions; some have already resigned from our denomination, and others are seriously considering doing so. I am compiling a list, and so far I am aware of the following resignations:

- 16 Presbyters (9 in the active work, 5 supernumeraries, 1 probationer and 1 student minister)
- 5 Presbyters are curtailing their appointments in August 2022, and 1 in August 2024, and 4 of these are superintendents.

- 60 Local Preachers, including one tutor, and a handful of worship leaders.
- Over 100 members have resigned from lots of different churches.
- 12 whole (or almost whole) congregations have left the Connexion amounting to over 300 people.
- Another 20 congregations are seriously considering leaving the Methodist Church in Britain, most of whom would like to be able to leave with their buildings, but this is not yet happening.

The above figures may only be the tip of the iceberg, and are likely to be out of date by the time you are reading this. If you are aware of resignations, please let me know by phone 07958 549146 or email development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk and provide as much detail as you feel able to. MET and the Voice of Methodist Association recently hosted Zoom meetings for both preachers and presbyters (about 50 of each) whose consciences are so deeply troubled that they doubt that they will be able to respond positively to the annual reaffirmations.

When I hear of resignations, I feel great sadness that people who have been part of the Methodist Church in Britain are leaving it (although many feel that it is the Methodist Church in Britain which is leaving them). Several people are experiencing a measure of grief, as they are losing the Church which has been such an important part of their lives. Part of my pastoral response has been to encourage people to focus on Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to experience his comfort and strength. And whilst not encouraging anyone to

leave, if they do feel called to leave, then I encourage them to look to the Good Shepherd to lead them into fresh green pastures and to still waters. Personally, I need to keep trusting in the Good Shepherd for my present and future.

In Hebrews 10:25 we read 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.' As Christians, it is so important that we are part of a Christian fellowship. For people's spiritual wellbeing, if they leave one fellowship they need to find a new spiritual home as soon as possible. Where whole congregations have left the Methodist Church in Britain, their congregations have already established themselves as fresh churches, either independent or with another denomination. In some areas, where several people have left a number churches, they are planting a new church together.

One of the more positive things to which I am looking forward, is attending MET events and meeting people face to face. Online meetings have been a great blessing over the past 18 months, yet there is different fellowship through meeting in person. I encourage you to attend MET events, and also to consider inviting me to your church or area to preach, to teach, to lead a quiet day, or for something else.

I am grateful for all the encouragement and support I receive from MET Members, including financial contributions, encouraging emails and phone calls, as well as prayer support (including prayer for my dad during his time of illness). It is a privilege to partner with you in sharing the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Derek

