

Dear Friends,

Sometimes when we hear a catchy tune, we find ourselves 'hearing' it in our mind for days after. Some people refer to this as having an 'ear worm'. A Bible verse has become a sort of ear worm for me in recent days. I have not heard it sung and I can't remember when I last heard it read, so perhaps 'ear worm' is the wrong expression. However, the words recur in my mind frequently.

*'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.'* Galatians 6:9.

I am very aware that our circuit relies on many retired people in order to maintain our work. Many people have been volunteering in the circuit and its churches for decades. Without their dedication we simply could not operate in the way that we do, whilst complying with good practice.

The Methodist system regularly presents 'must have' new projects and emphases. The call to join in God's mission is far from new but it is regularly presented to us again by the Connexion dressed in new clothes and using new terminology. Sometimes these new schemes can motivate us. At other time they can dishearten us as we remember previous slogans, and we might even think, *'here we go again'*. Hopefully, we are still able to catch a vision and 'ride the waves' as the tides of the Spirit ebb and flow. May God grant us wisdom to 'discern the spirits' and know His divine will.

The 2021 Lent book by Hannah Steele, *'Living His Story: Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways'*, makes a vital point which I fear is too easily overlooked. Evangelism is about pointing people to Jesus. Simple as that. When we discover that the Spirit has prepared receptive hearts to receive God's love, then we will be pushing at an open door and the problem of empty pews and declining membership will be resolved. All we need to do is to be led by the Holy Spirit and 'gossip the gospel' (to use an even older term). Tell our friends and neighbours how prayer helps us, how Bible reading sustains us, how church fellowship nourishes us. Revival comes not so much because of clever plans, but when our hearts are on fire, burning with the love of God and overflowing with the joy of salvation. Hearts and minds are most often won one at a time. Hannah Steele gives much valuable guidance and many topical examples.

At the pandemic anniversary, many of us may be weary of it all and have had to relearn the importance of self-care. I am incredibly grateful to the Methodist Church for enabling me to attend to my own self-care in a holistic way by taking my postponed sabbatical. I entered training for Christian work in 1973, being commissioned and ordained in 1975. I entered the Methodist ministry in 1987 and was ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament in 1989. In 2003 I became a superintendent minister. This is my 5<sup>th</sup> circuit appointment. I have been itinerant, having served in 5 different Methodist Districts. And so, it has been a fairly long journey and my previous sabbaticals have all helped me to be refreshed and renewed as I have journeyed on.

My Sabbatical starts on Saturday, just before Palm Sunday ushers in Holy Week. Rev David Faulkner will be acting as Superintendent Minister and he has arranged a rota of contributors for the weekly pastoral emails. Rev Allan Taylor has kindly agreed to give pastoral care to my churches. Sue Howson will be continuing to work as Circuit Administrator. Please do not send emails to my Gmail account, as these will no longer be read. The correct email for me is shown in the Circuit Directory of 2020: keith.beckingham@methodist.org.uk. During the sabbatical there will be an out of office message.

I came across some wise words written by the 'Prince of Preachers', the incomparable C. H. Spurgeon: *'Therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith.'* When we do feel weary in well-doing, we could do a lot worse than follow his advice.

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister