

Faithful and True – Beyond 2020 Vision

being a Lincolnshire Methodist in the 2020s

Foreword

When we set out on the Toward 2020 Vision consultation eight years ago the world was a very different place. At that time, the priorities of the Church in Lincolnshire were also very different.

Since then many socio-political and environmental changes have swept across the planet. Our county, including the Methodist Church within it, has not been immune from the impact.

In 2012 we were wondering what it meant to be a Methodist in a wider Church where, thrillingly at the time, the individual denominations appeared to be drawing closer together.

We were understandably anxious about how we maintained and developed our smaller congregations in chapels that needed to restate their presence in the wider community.

In addition, the prospect of fewer and fewer ordained ministers was a daunting one.

The consequences of the Government's austerity programme were only just beginning to show.

Out of these and numerous other areas of concern, we drew up a strategy that

- sought to raise our identity as a movement within a covenanted church where there would be interchangeability of ministry
 - we changed the name of the District from Lincoln & Grimsby to Lincolnshire
 - we created a logo that reflected our common heritage with the wider county which manifested itself in pin badges, church signage and letterheads
- stressed our need to work alongside those with whom we shared common values and goals
 - and in so doing were instrumental in founding the Greater Lincoln Active Faith Network which acts as a representative of churches in all aspects of social responsibility
- developed lay ministry through
 - the Local Church Pastor Scheme which was to enhance and complement ministry often in chapels where ordained ministers with pastoral oversight were finding it a challenge to give much time to
 - community chaplaincy, which eventually came about by default as we sought to rescue the wonderful Lincolnshire Community Health Care Chaplaincy Project following the collapse of the Lincolnshire Chaplaincy Services.
- expressed a desire to make better use of our premises

The implementation of Toward 2020 Vision was mixed. Much was achieved, but more could have been, it was ever thus.

So it is that we now reach a new decade with renewed hope in what we might yet fulfil and seek to do that is fresh and innovative.

In 2012 we could not have accurately predicted that political extremisms would grip the democratic world in the way that it they have; that families, friendship circles and indeed whole communities would become as deeply divided as they are. In some respects, political populism has helped foster a religious populism that threatens to divide churches. So much of what has happened in the political world is now beginning to be mirrored in the Church:

- ecumenism is failing as individual denominations seek to rescue themselves from the demise that has assaulted western Christianity for more than a century;
- greater centralisation and a desire to implement uniform strategies are failing to take into account specific contextual differences;
- intolerance of differing opinions let alone beliefs is becoming a clear feature of interaction.

The disconnect is already present and deepens with each knee jerk reaction to the challenges we face. This is the background to the responses we have received to the Beyond 2020 Vision Plus questionnaire.

It therefore came as little surprise that the perceived overriding need was for churches and individuals to be better equipped to face the circumstances in which we have been called as disciples of Jesus.

As a District we had already begun to address this through both Insight mornings and District Weekends at Launde.

The Positive Prevention Project which arose out of the need to become more aware of what negative attitudes were doing to our society is another significant feature of our work.

But it is clear that more needs to be done in order to provide spaces and resources to face the decade ahead.

Renewing confidence in the local is vital if we are to remain effective and meaningful as centres of faith, worship and healing.

Whilst the climate crises, plural not singular, have been present for some time, we are now beginning to realise that no one should deny that they are upon us and that we should be quickly moving from the appeasement that has failed toward more concerted actions that will demand great efforts from us as Stewards of Creation.

So the priorities for us in the coming decade must surely be to

- further develop our already present wonderful lay ministries and consider being even more creative in new areas of ministry

- increase our awareness of what we may yet achieve in the healing of both relationships and the environment
- be faithful and true in everything.

A sophisticated understanding of what it is to be faithful and true will have to be grasped lest we fall for the tribalism, populism and extremism that have become so much a feature of our world today.

The humility of honesty and openness, the grace that loves and loves again whatever the cost, the covenantal commitment that demands little if anything in return and the sheer authenticity of being real in an arrogant, selfish and short-sighted world have to become so routine in our lives and churches that we don't hesitate.

This is not about saving the Church but playing our part in saving the world. It was not to save religion that Jesus came into the world, but to show us all what the true nature of God is. It was not about replacing one set of doctrines or rituals for another set, it was not to get one over anyone else, it was not to play the blame game, rather it was to speak and act with mercy and justice, to heal the wounds, to reconcile those who had been parted and to ensure life, amazingly rich life, could be experienced and guaranteed.

This is no small task to which we have been invited to undertake. But whenever the Church has had its back against the wall, whenever its members have had to take a stand in a society that is hostile to the inherent good and when the dark seems to be setting in, resilient purpose has become possible.

So, we will be faithful and true, not seeking to save the church for we will only end up losing it if we do, but instead to lose that which has held us back and in so doing may just end up having a significant role in the coming decade, one which some have claimed to be the decade to save the world.

Every blessing

The Revd Bruce Thompson

Chair of the Lincolnshire Methodist District

Lent 2020

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- **Be good neighbours**
 - promoting inclusivity
 - challenging prejudice and discrimination
- **Grow in Confidence**
 - equipping faithful discipleship
 - telling our stories
- **Develop creative worship**
 - encouraging innovative approaches
- **Value and ageing population**
 - caring for and empowering people
- **Reach younger people**
 - engaging effectively with children, teenagers and young adults
- **Connect with our communities**
 - relating to our diverse context
 - meeting people of all circumstances where they are
 - communicating in appropriate ways
- **Respond to our Climate Emergency**
 - modelling good practice
 - agitating for change
- **Promote well-being**
 - combatting rural isolation
 - developing positive mental health