

Dear Friends,

I am writing this on a grey November afternoon in the week before going off to Northampton to be part of the second phase of the Stationing Matching process – our Church's method (which, in my view, generally works pretty well) of responding to the needs of Circuits for ordained ministry, and of ministers to be stationed in situations which will fulfil them in their ministry and make good use of their gifts and experience. But as I think of the needs of the ministers on the move from this District and of the Circuits from this District this year seeking ministry, I am conscious also that you will be reading this letter over the Christmas period, in the midst of our annual celebration of God's gift of Himself to the world – the Word made flesh and dwelling among us in the person of Jesus, His Son, who is Light shining in our darkness, the gift of hope for our world, for all people, for all time. And as I reflect, it's that stark contrast between the gift of the One, the reflection of God's love, from which all our hope stems, and of the many who will be the gift in ministry – hopefully, joyfully received – to the Circuits of our Church, that I find striking and compelling.

Whatever we may feel – and this will perhaps be especially true for those who do not receive the gift of the minister that they expect and hope for and feel that they need – I believe that God gives to us the ministry that we need; not always the ministry that we want or hope for. Our task is to make effective use of all the resources available to us – of time, of people, of buildings and money. And that's a challenge to mission and ministry for the whole people of God – all of us, not merely those who are ordained. This challenge to more effectively use all our God-given resource, lies, as you will all by now I hope know, at the heart of the Mapping a Way Forward: Re-grouping for Mission process which we have been working with in this District over the past year or so and which is being followed through across the Methodist Connexion. Along with this letter you will also find an update from Rod Hill, our District Development Enabler, of where we now are in that process. Please do take careful note of what he has to say and engage, in your local Churches and Circuits in the ongoing process of consultation, which will move us on in mission.

But, whilst our personal missionary challenge must be based in the local communities of which we are part, we do well also to remind ourselves that we are part of a World Church which is growing. Over the autumn we have been running, in collaboration with Liverpool Hope University, a series of lectures which have taken place at the Princes Park Church in the Liverpool South Circuit, under the overall title of 'The City in One World' – seeking to broaden our horizons and learn in mission from what is happening in the Church across the world. I suppose this is in my mind because the last in this particular series took place last night. We were told last night that one third of the world's population is Christian. The centre of the Christian world may have shifted from white Western Europe, but the Light of Christ is not dimmed or dimming – His Light still shines. We are hoping that there will be a future collaboration with Liverpool Hope, so please watch out for the dates.

One further set of dates for your diaries. The President and Vice President of Conference, the Revd David Gamble and Dr Richard Vautrey, will be visiting the District from Tuesday 2nd March to Sunday 7th March next year. We are at the moment in the process of developing the programme for their visit. As this will be an extended visit, we have the opportunity this year to put in place a programme which, hopefully, will enable David and Richard, not only to visit but to seriously and deeply engage with rather more people across the District than has been possible in the recent past. Do watch out for the programme details and support the events as much as you are able.

Finally, may I wish you all a joyful and blessed Christmas. May Christ truly draw near to your heart this Christmas that you may be filled with the hope and joy and peace that only He can bring.

With every good wish.

Jim Booth