

Summer 2020

Circuit News Special

CIRCUIT NEWS AND VIEWS FOR BANGOR & HOLYHEAD METHODIST CIRCUIT

THE MISSION OF THE BANGOR & HOLYHEAD CIRCUIT IS TO LIVE OUT GOD'S WORD AND SHARE THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST BY LOVING AND CARING WHOLE-HEARTEDLY THROUGH SERVICE AND WORSHIP WITH FUN, FELLOWSHIP AND JOY FOR ALL THE CHURCH FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY.

Black Lives Matter Special Edition



The Circuit Newsletter has developed since its first edition way back in April. Over the months we have had an increasing number of people contribute from across the circuit and we have also had input from people connected to the circuit. I am very thankful to Laura Cobham and Peter Bonnebaigt that they have been willing to share their experiences with us.

It was with some fear and trepidation that we included some longer and more serious articles, however, they have been well received and the editorial team has had lots of positive feedback and additional articles. We have therefore decided to put together the items on Black Lives Matter into a special edition of the Newsletter.

A second special edition is planned to link into Harvest Time and will be about how as Christians we need to care for our environment and the world we live in.

This special edition also includes "Letters to the Editor", a new feature we intend to bring to the regular publication.

Following on from Peter Bonnebaigt's article in June's newsletter, Rosemary & John Nunn immediately thought of the dissertation written by their great-niece Laura. She has kindly allowed us to share a very small part of the total, for our newsletter. Laura was a student at Salford University until last year and wrote her dissertation on the experience of growing up black in Britain. When we read it we were shocked to realise that a member of my own extended family experienced racism, albeit sometimes unconscious, as a part of her everyday life. She grew up in a relatively small village and in the introduction to her dissertation she writes as follows:



"Growing up and never meeting anyone like you is such a strange and isolating feeling, as it can make you feel as though you are the only one in the world. Feeling unsure of what it is to be of black heritage, as a mixed race person myself, it was difficult and so I can only imagine what the white people around us felt. While nobody was particularly outwardly racist to our faces, when my little sister used to play at friends' houses, their parents would be nice to her face but made racist remarks later on when she went home and her friends would tell her the things that their parents had said about her afterwards. I've experienced at least 2 occasions where classmates have used the N-word in front of me and it worries me that people, particularly people who grow up in small towns and villages, do not understand diversity or racism, and are now themselves becoming figures of authority, meaning that this low level racism perpetuates.

The friends that I did have were all lovely and I wanted to fit in so would let them straighten my hair when they used to say 'your hair would look so pretty straight.' I didn't realise at the time but this made me feel like I should look like them to feel more of a part of the group. They didn't mean this maliciously, but it's a phrase which insinuated that the closer my proximity to being white, the more pretty I would be. This is the way that structural racism has set society up, in order to capitalise on brown people's insecurities. This is something I tried to deter my younger sister from joining in with, as I didn't want her to damage her hair, which she was straightening every day at one point, but also felt that it was important for her to own her curly hair. When I was a lot younger, I hated my wide set nose, brown skin and my frizzy hair but as I've grown up and been exposed to more, different, brown people, I realise that I am normal and there are others that look like me; if anything, I would now like my hair to be more curly and my skin more brown!"

Laura's conclusion:

"I don't feel particularly optimistic about the future for black people as at the moment, we as a country are reverting back to less tolerant ways. I really hope that things do change as I worry about my future and the lives of any children I will have as I want them to live in a world where they don't feel anything but pride to be brown."

Laura is talking about now! Her dissertation was written last year.

This does so highlight how we must all adopt Peter's three simple steps to improving things.

Beyond Lockdown – committing to anti-racism in mission.

John Hay reflects upon a Methodist webinar he attended.

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On 6 July with 73 others I attended a challenging zoom webinar organized by the Methodist Church which had the above title.

Two key questions were addressed, namely:

How does racism impact Methodist mission?

What do we do about it?

There was a panel of contributors, which included recognized Methodist speakers such as Rev. Dr. Inderjit Bhogal OBE (pictured), Janet Hinds and Trey Hall. Each took it in turn to speak for a few minutes to answer the first key question, before we were put into breakout rooms with a facilitator and asked to address the second question.



Following that discussion, we then went back to the main group and each facilitator fed back what had been said, before the main contributors then spoke again for a few minutes each to try and answer the same question, before there was a brief question and answer session to conclude. This is my very poor summary of what was said.....

Question 1 - How does racism impact mission in the Methodist Church?

Contributors made the following points.

- Racism weakens mission in the church because where it exists, we are not practising what we preach and we are acting contrary to the Gospel of Christ. It is an impediment to the stated calling and Mission of the Methodist Church.
- We are wasting the gifts of a great many talented members of the Church family. Racism brings structural weakness, and a culture of white dominated leadership means the Church does not reflect all it's members.
- Racism causes division. Engagement is the key, listening to other perspectives.
- It is easy for many to slip in to cultural racism, that the Church has to work through the concept of white privilege, and that racism in the church, makes a mockery of mission.
- Racism is multi-layered and rears it's head in many ways. In language, assumptions, racial stereotyping and especially in unconscious bias.
- Racism affects people of colour by institutional and systemic oppression, and it also lifts up and privileges white folk. Ant-racism is not just about lifting the oppression of people of colour, it is also about dismantling the systems of privilege.

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Question 2 - What do we need to do about it?

On a personal basis, we need to call out and challenge racism wherever it exists.

- Education is key, both for congregation and leaders. Anti-Racism/Racism awareness training should be encouraged for all. There are lots of resources available e.g. EDI Toolkit and unconscious bias.
- Meet, share and especially LISTEN to the stories and perspectives of people of colour on how they feel within the church.
- Systemic change is required. The diversity of the church needs reflecting in the leadership.
- Confidence can be built by making church systems transparent and accessible.
- There needs to be accepted minimum standards.
- Monitoring.
- Growing self-awareness and addressing the legacy of cultural superiority which underpins racism, so that we acquire cultural intelligence.
- "We should not require people to take off their own cultural robes when they come through the church doors."
- "Trust and confidence is the banner."
- "Every church needs to be about anti-racism...Get it in the conversation, put it on the Agenda."

Just as I was feeling like I had been hit over the head with a mallet, a final crucial point was made – "If all of this seems overwhelming, do not lose sight of the fact that God has got us and we do what we do by God's power."

Much for us to get to grips with.....If anyone would like to view this webinar for themselves, a recorded version is now on the Methodist Church website - www.methodist.org.uk - along with a number of other Post Lockdown Mission related webinars.

John Hay

The EDI Toolkit

The EDI Toolkit looks at the law, theological underpinning, age, class and economic justice, disability and impairment, gender, race, sexual orientation, same sex couples and their families, poverty, being made in God's image, domestic abuse and most recently the definition and guidance about homophobia, which was adopted by the 2016 Conference.

The toolkit is designed to support the discipleship and mission of the Methodist Church and enrich the life of the Church in seeking to equip Methodists to go beyond legal compliance, being based on the principle that all humankind is made in God's image, and therefore worthy of dignity and respect.

It's also about the gospel values and behaviours that Christians and Methodists want to share with the wider communities in which they live, work and serve.

To find out more, please visit the EDI section of the Methodist Church website.



***For those who missed June's Circuit News,
Peter Bonnebaigt's article is reproduced below:***

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Growing together: learning how to love.

I reflect here upon a journey I have just begun in an issue I have always been part of. Although this may sound contradictory, for how can someone have always been a part of something they have just begun, my lack of understanding has led me, until now, to not acknowledge my involvement in the issue.

I have been unaware, at times oblivious, to the level to which this issue is ingrained in the foundations of society, although this is the case it does not excuse my impact in this matter. Growth however is not defined by the failings of my past; instead by the choices I make in the present, having learned from these failings, to inform and shape the future.



The issue in question is race and privilege. The following reflects my findings as simply a beginner, a learner, within this. I can't ever begin to understand the impact or effect this issue has had on people of colour, I can however share my learning with the hope it can encourage people who have enjoyed the same white privilege I have to begin to listen to, and learn from, the experiences of people of colour with an aim to humbly and selflessly hear their reality.

My intention is not to devalue any hardship or struggles you may have experienced, these are valid and important. Nor is it to label white people as racist, for many this is not true. Not being racist however is no longer enough, to bring about change we must be anti racist; proactively not be racist. With that in mind it is imperative in this moment to collectively stand with people of colour, and together pursue changes in the foundations of society which will upturn and remove the embedded forms of racism that we are encouraged and allowed to ignore.

It is uncomfortable and difficult to do but we must humble ourselves in order to see and accept the privilege white people are afforded.

As a white person I have never had to think about race. My parents have never had to explain to me that I am white or talk to me about difficulties I may encounter, prejudice I may receive, experiences I may be denied, or brutality that may be directed towards me because of my race. I've never felt my voice would be quashed, and never feared losing a job or accommodation due to my colour. People of colour are not given this same freedom. The same world that allows me those simple privileges forces people of colour to have to notice and think about these things and much more besides.

This is the privilege that we, as white people, must see and accept exists if we are to collectively move forward and affect the foundational issues that take the purpose and freedoms from so many people in our communities. It is not a question of beating ourselves up for having this privilege and living in shame, that will help no one. It is rather a question of learning and increasing our understanding to be able to grow, change, and best stand with people of colour in the present and future to ensure this privilege does not remain or define our communities. It is everyone's responsibility, no matter what colour, to stand together and begin to re-shape our communities to

So how can we as white people start to contribute positively to this issue?

Humility is once again vital to approaching this. Here are three simple ways to begin to be the change right now:

Listen It's important that people are heard, and not just heard but listened to. So often people listen to comment rather than hear, to justify and protect themselves and their actions rather than understand the perspective of those who are affected.

It's easy to feel defensive in conversations around this topic, it's uncomfortable to hear that your skin colour gives you privilege. This is not a character trial however, it's a conversation designed to further understand the issues, to hear the stories, and to be given an insight into the emotions these issues insight. There is no way to ever fully comprehend the experiences of people of colour, even so we must still do our best to empathise as best we can.



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It should be uncomfortable, anyone comfortable with the atrocities of racism must re-evaluate their moral compass. Change in its very nature is uncomfortable, it takes you from a place of familiarity into the unknown. In time however, these new places become known, they become the new familiar.

Eventually we will re-define the foundations of society to not include racist undertones, right now however we must get a little uncomfortable, listen, and hear. Not talk, just hear.

Learn Knowledge is the death of ignorance. Engaging with learning is a great way to further understanding of this issue. Learning the history gives context, knowing the facts removes confusion, and hearing the experiences gives an emotional connection and foundation.

Resources are abundant and more available than ever. They exist in a variety of formats and mediums giving now more than ever the best possible chance to learn, and enjoy the learning. Documentaries, dramas, podcasts, books, articles, all manner of resources exist to enable you to learn however you choose.

Learning doesn't have to be a big task. It can feel overwhelming approaching a new subject but small manageable amounts will lead to the biggest understanding. Much like no one would expect an individual to be fluent in a new language after a week, no one expects mastery of content in a short space of time. Perhaps start with one article, chapter, or video a day or week and go from there. The important thing is to make a start and continue the process from there..

Learning is a lifelong thing. No one will ever know everything, it's ok to not know much. Committing to know more and expand your understanding though is a good practice for life and for advancement of community cohesion.

Love People should feel loved throughout this process, through our actions we can demonstrate this love. Expressing solidarity, standing together will all help and will allow us to start to embody the society that people deserve to live in. One where all feel safe, free, and loved abundantly no matter who they are. It's not acceptable that people feel angry, or sad, or worried because of the colour of their skin; it's our responsibility as humans to show each other we can do better and to create a community across the world which represents this, one we all feel loved in.

Take small actions to show this. Perhaps one of the above, listening to hear and grow, learning to increase understanding and awareness. Simply taking ownership over your actions can bring change too, with each decision you make or thing you say, consider the impact on others and ask yourself if it is loving. That is a choice everyone has in each and every moment.

I don't here, nor should I, decide the ways which change should come in all of this. My race has decided the fates of others throughout history. Instead I present the ways in which I look to be the best and most supportive friend and ally in this. It is an ongoing process, I don't have all the answers. Next week I will have gained new understanding and fresh insight; that is a good thing, to always be looking to and pursuing growth. These are simple things I am going to do now; listen to the stories and experiences, learn and expand my knowledge to remove my ignorance, and love all people through my actions. I compel you to do the same. Collectively society has failed so many people, this however doesn't have to be our future. It's important for each of us to engage in change and proactively push to be more than 'not racist', to be anti racist. One big change from a single person can easily be overlooked by the majority, one small change from every single person is much harder to ignore. This will lead to the systemic changes society needs, and people deserve. Choose to be anti racist each and every day, choose to be the change.

Peter Bonnebaigt



Rev. Ken Sykes offers a personal reflection:

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The Church and Racism

I was reading a blog, 'Undermining Racism', by Prof. N.T. Wright of St. Andrews University, Scotland the other day.

An African American woman theologian had said to him, 'You need remember that when you talk about being "all one in Christ Jesus", what people like me hear is that "you are all now welcome to become honorary white males".'

It's not enough, he says, for us to go on saying how wicked racism is and how we won't tolerate it. Rather our glorious vocation, individually and as The Church, is to be small working models of the ultimate New Creation which God launched in raising Jesus from the dead.

By and large we have forgotten this. Paul in Colossians 3.11 insists that in the Jesus-following family there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised or not, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, as we are renewed in the image of the Creator.

Today's secular vision of a multicultural global society is at its best a Christian ideal detached from its Christian roots. And if you try that, your efforts will collapse into a shrill shouting-match of competing special interests. Watch the news!

God's plan was always to renew the whole creation, and for Himself to come and live with humans in that new world (Revelation 21 and 22). We, The Church, are supposed to be the new advance signpost. God is going to put all things right at the end; but in the present he puts sinners like us right ('justification') so that we can become both a sign of, and an active agent towards, those future purposes.

We are not simply a loose association of people who have all had similar spiritual experiences. But we are called to be a worship-based, spiritually renewed, multi-ethnic, gender-blind in leadership, many-coloured, mutually supportive, outward-facing, culturally creative, socially responsible family group. A sign to the world that there is a different way to be human, a strong and subversive signal that God's new creation is a reality-in-waiting, challenging the world's ways of organizing human life.

Jesus prayed 'That they may all be one – so that the world may believe': that was his prayer and it should be ours as well. Pentecost: many languages, a single message, the Spirit flowing into all the world, creating a single polychrome and polyglot family, Jesus-followers at home everywhere and nowhere. We are the advance guard of God's new creation. And this affects everything, from economics to medicine to sexual behaviour to education to worship styles – you can't pick and choose. New creation means new creation, across the board.

Only then will the multiple human differences, refracted through the prism of the new life in Jesus, form the coherent unity of the Body of Christ with its many members. It won't do simply to wring our hands over racism. If we have died to our past identities and have put on Christ we are a new creation. The old past away, the new is here. That undermines all racism and all other divisive elements of society – including the white male privilege.

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We are, of course, a company of sinners. We need to pray 'forgive us our trespasses'. We need to forgive. We all make mistakes. We need a glorious amnesty of mutual forgiveness. The world's ways can never achieve that. But the gospel of Jesus can. It can pave the way to a fresh start. A sign to the world that the crucified and risen Jesus – the one who forgives, the one who puts things right at last – is its rightful Lord. I hope this is a fair and accurate whilst deeply edited summary of part of the full blog - which can be seen at

<https://ntwrightpage.com/2020/06/14/undermining-racism-complete-text/>.

Rev Ken Sykes

Letters to the Editor

Contribution to "Letters Page" of Circuit Newsletter.

Thank you Peter Bonnebaigt for expressing my experience so clearly in your article on Black Lives Matter in the recent Circuit News. We also have lived in multi-cultural cities and have had Black and Asian friends and colleagues. Whereas we recognised the racial discrimination and cultural misunderstandings people experienced in Manchester in the 60's, when living in Birmingham at the turn of the century, I assumed that was a thing of the past and were completely unaware of the way people were still suffering. The stories of people's horrifying experience, including those in the current edition of Connexion has been a wakeup call.

Anne Jackson

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