

Rev Tim Perkins
June 8th 2021

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” John 12: 24.

Dear Friends,

I need to take the opportunity provided by the Circuit Pastoral Letter this week to let you know of some significant decisions that have been made in recent days, which particularly affect our congregations at Otley and Yeadon but which also have implications for the whole Circuit. The following decisions have already been shared with the congregations at Otley and Yeadon and I encourage us all to hold them in our prayers over the coming months.

Otley Methodist Church

After prayerful discussion the following significant decisions were made, sadly but necessarily, by the recent meeting of the Otley Church Council.

- That in light of the contents of the 2020 quinquennial inspection of the premises, the very recent quantity surveyors report, and the almost exhausted financial resources, we recognise the need to dispose of our current premises.
- That we therefore resolve to set in motion the process leading to *the sale of all our current premises*. (The Church Council carefully considered selling *part* of the premises, but concluded that this was complex, expensive, and significantly reduced the possibility of gaining a proportionate price for *part* of the premises.)

These decisions will need to be ratified by the Circuit Meeting on 17th June (the members of which will receive a more detailed paper outlining the reasons behind them) and then processes for approval from the wider church and for marketing and sale will be implemented. Whilst this news will come as a shock to many folk, I am encouraged by the Church Council's desire to continue the life of the congregation, to develop a new vision for their future life and mission, and to look for a new home – the story of Methodism in Otley is far from over and as a Circuit we will do all we can to enable a new and positive chapter to take shape.

There will be significant financial impact upon the wider Circuit as the congregation at Otley are not currently able to meet their share of the Circuit assessment. The Circuit Meeting will need to consider how best to cover this. The Circuit Meeting will also need to consider whether it is prepared to help meet the costs involved in the sale of the premises through the provision of loans secured against the sale price of the premises.

Deacon Jenny Parnell

At the request of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order and after much prayer and conversation with colleagues, Deacon Jenny has agreed to move appointment a year sooner than we were anticipating and will be leaving us at the beginning of August. This has come as both a surprise and challenge to Jenny and to the Circuit Leadership Team but we recognise that our wider Church has identified Jenny as the person best equipped to meet a particular need and so we release her and send her on her way with our love, prayers and blessing for her future ministry. A Circuit Farewell Service is being arranged for the evening of Sunday 25th July via zoom and Jenny's final service in the Circuit will be at Yeadon on Sun 1st August.

Both the Warden of the Diaconal Order and our Chair of District realise that this will create significant difficulties in our own Circuit in ensuring adequate and suitable Ministerial resources and will bare us in mind should any further resources become available in the coming weeks and months. The Circuit Leadership Team is already engaged in exploring what additional resources might be helpful and how best to utilise the continuing staff team over the coming year as we continue to work towards having a new staffing model in place for Sept 2022. Further updates will be provided in due course.

Other Staff changes

We shall also be saying farewell in the coming weeks to Rev's Leonora Wassel and Martyn Atkins. Leonora will be retiring in August and Martyn will be leaving us at the end of June to spend a year working with the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church in America. The gifts, experiences and ministry that both Lee and Martyn have brought to the Circuit have been greatly appreciated, especially at Pool, Hawksworth and Otley and just as in Jenny's case the Circuit Leadership Team are actively exploring what sort of appointments might be feasible and appropriate to follow on from them. We are hoping that Lee will be able to return to work from her period of ill-health leave before the end of July in order to be able to finish off pieces of work and say proper farewells.

Timble Methodist Church

Following approval from the Circuit Meeting and other necessary bodies the process of sale of Timble Methodist Chapel is now almost at completion. We are hoping to be able to sort some type of Thanksgiving Service in the coming weeks but you will appreciate that our current restrictions make this very difficult in such a small building. Details will be distributed once arrangements have been confirmed. Whether we are able to meet together or not, we give thanks for the life and ministry of Timble chapel and it's members in that community and we give thanks for the resources that will be released through it's sale in order to help us meet some of our current challenges and to invest in new missional opportunities.

I understand that so much change in such a short space of time, after such a difficult period can be both daunting and unsettling. However, as I reflect on the challenges that these decisions and changes bring to us I am reminded that every problem also presents us with an opportunity. It is all too easy for us to become ever more insular and to moan and grumble when things don't go how we expect them to. In fact, grumbling is a theme which runs throughout the pages of Scripture. It is often seen as a reflection of the fear that people can fall into if they are unable to trust that God will provide. The antidote to it is to hope in God and speak words only of encouragement.

I do not have the resources of time, energy, gifts or experience to be able to solve all of the challenges that our Circuit faces at this time. Neither do any of my staff colleagues or the members of the Circuit Leadership Team. But actually that has never been God's plan. If it were, there would be no need for faith, or indeed for God. Yes, we work hard and conscientiously to discern God's plan and to apply the resources God has placed at our disposal wisely and as good stewards. But we do not control the outcomes. Only God can do that and we must allow God the space to work with us and through us and be content to release the outcomes to God's gracious provision. Now, more than ever, we have to pray to God, we have to trust in God and we have to be attuned to God's guidance for our future lives and ministries and God will provide the resources and make the way straight.

It helps enormously in that process if we seek to encourage one another and build one another up rather than grumble or complain. That is not to say that we shouldn't express concerns or ideas about what might take shape as that is an important part of our process of discernment. Indeed, I would be delighted to receive any thoughts that you may have. But please express them with grace and kindness and seek to encourage all those who hold office or express ministry in the life of your church. These challenges present themselves at a time when many

in ministry across the connexion are tired bordering on exhausted from the impact of the last 16 months. We need your prayers, encouragement, love and support as we seek to lead – as best we can – our circuit into a new and exciting future.

It is in the letting go – of often treasured things and people – that we create space for God to do a new thing!

Every blessing,

Rev Tim