



Yorkshire North & East Methodist District

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT CHAIR, THE REVD LESLIE NEWTON

September 2020

Dear friends

I'm pleased to report that plans are well underway for our second District gathering - "Flourish 21" - on Friday 17th to Sunday 19th September 2021. Notwithstanding current uncertainties, we anticipate that the Scarborough Spa will be our venue again, and we are in the process of inviting speakers and guests - more details soon! We are very much hoping and praying that by then we will be able to confidently welcome, as last time, over a thousand people from around the District. I hope you share my hopefulness as I look forward to this event.

Our theme will be "Rooted in Love" (inspired by Ephesians 3:17). We will be unpacking this theme in lots of different ways, focussing particularly upon the three core strands of Jesus' Great Commandments, in Matthew 22:37-38, "*Love God : Love Your Neighbour : Love Yourself.*" Here are three vital dimensions of our life as followers of Christ. Those who followed "The Great 50 Days" District programme from Easter to Pentecost may remember that we focussed on them as part of that programme.

Great as it will be to have chance to unpack them more deeply in September 2021, I want to point to their importance now as we continue to walk through these days of uncertainty and challenge. Let me offer a brief word about each of them here, in reverse order!

LOVE YOURSELF

Perhaps you really need to hear that just now as you read this letter? Perhaps you need to give yourself permission to focus more deliberately on caring for yourself? Many of us are facing many concerns for family, community, church and world. However, we can't sustain our care for others if we don't look after ourselves well. One of the first messages we hear on an aeroplane is the reminder that in an emergency a mask will drop down. At that point we need to focus on putting our own mask on first before helping others.

Please take time to love yourself - in whatever practical ways are possible and work for you: clear some space in your diary, take some exercise, do something 'fun', arrange a walk with a friend, find a mindfulness course, talk to a friend or your pastoral visitor about how things are for you. Whatever works for you! But do something fresh that is all about loving yourself. It's not of itself selfish, it's taking seriously the wondrous truth that "we love, because God first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

There are so many stories from all around our District of how, during these Covid-19 days, people have been shining like stars in service and love of neighbours. Thank you! Alongside some large-scale projects have been the many, many smaller acts of service, which have been life-giving and hope-bringing: the phone calls, the greeting cards, the sending of small gifts, the delivery of shopping. Thank you!

But as the effects of this pandemic continue, I think we need to recognise its growing toll on the fabric of our relationships. For half a year we have had severely limited interactions with each other. The energy, empathy and emotional strength we gain from our 'real' meetings is far harder to replicate on Zoom. I valued hearing someone recently suggest that perhaps our particular focus, in these challenging days, should be on being 'kind' to our neighbours. Think of how much we will all be blessed by mutual, sustained kindness: being kind to each other, even when we're stressed and anxious, whilst recognising that our neighbours are also possibly stressed and anxious. Whilst we wait and long for a Covid vaccine, what a great antidote kindness can be to fear and anxiety.

Please know of the ongoing care, prayers and support of ministers and lay leaders around our District. If you're struggling to find the support you need, please contact the District Office at admin@yorkshirenethodist.org or 07809 431871

LOVE GOD

This is, of course, foundational! Thank you to everyone who has enabled worship to continue and develop in these last six months – through the development on online worship, and the regular distribution of printed services. As some of our church buildings re-open, a further huge thank you to all those who have worked so hard to make sure that everything is safe. However, the danger now is that we end up exhausted by putting back everything we used to do alongside everything new we have done in lockdown. That is just not sustainable! So, there's some urgent thinking to do about exploring new patterns.

Beyond the opportunities for worship, may I encourage you to focus more deeply on your relationship with God through *prayer*. I am personally feeling challenged to ask you to join with me in more committed and deeper prayer. There are good resources available: through local churches and circuits, the District prayer diary, the Connexional Prayer Handbook. Also, this year we are invited by our Connexion to join in a Year of Prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help us be a growing, evangelistic, inclusive justice-seeking Church of gospel people. Every Tuesday at 12.45pm there is a Connexional online prayer meeting for 15 minutes, available online afterwards. For more information [click here](http://www.methodist.org.uk/yearofprayer) (www.methodist.org.uk/yearofprayer)

So, I'm really looking forward to Flourish 21. I really hope it will be a wonderful celebration and time of joy and blessing. But it's still a year away.

Let's be focussed on these key themes now – they are for every one of us, for every day of our lives: Love God, Love your Neighbour, Love yourself.

Every blessing

The poster features a red background with a white floral pattern. At the top left is the Yorkshire North & East Methodist District logo, a circular emblem with a cross and a dove. To its right, the text 'Flourish | 21' is written in a large, white, cursive font, with 'ROOTED IN LOVE' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. The central text reads 'LOVE GOD - LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR - LOVE YOURSELF' in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this, a smaller line of text says 'A time of inspiration and celebration, worship and fellowship as together we dig deeper into how we can fulfil Our Calling and grow as Flourishing Missional Communities.' Underneath that is 'Bringing people together from across the District in a weekend for all ages'. At the bottom, a white line contains the text 'We look forward to sharing our growing line up with you soon'. The very bottom of the poster has a white box containing the dates '17th - 19th September 2021' and the location 'Location: Scarborough Spa'.