

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

08:07:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Some of you will remember that in the front garden of the District Manse stands a medium-sized horse chestnut tree but not all of you will know the story behind this specimen! The tree does not belong to us or indeed the District but is the property of the previous Chair the Revd. Graham Thompson. Graham planted the tree as a seedling whilst studying at Wesley College Bristol and since that time it has itinerated with each move across the Connexion. In September 2014 when he was redirected by the Conference to be Chair of the Plymouth and Exeter District it was felt by all concerned that it was too great a distance for the tree to travel to the south west. Hence for the time being, the treasured chestnut tree remains at Wentworth Green until such time as the Thompsons return to the county and perhaps it will find its final resting place somewhere in Norfolk. Needless to say Jean and I take great care to look after the tree whilst ever it remains in our safekeeping and from time to time we send through the occasional photograph to reassure all concerned!

On a more serious note the tree is a perpetual reminder to me of *vocation* – that sense that each and every one of us, made in the image of God, has a particular calling to *be* someone and to *do* something as we respond to the one who has lovingly created us. Our sense of vocation needs to be nurtured with care and grace over the course of a lifetime and it will change and evolve as we find ourselves in different contexts. Our calling is never simply our *own* calling but one that is held in the company of *all* God's people and therefore something that grows in relation to the support, prayers and encouragement of others. Famously Frederick Buechner once defined vocation as 'the place where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet' – in other words it is that deep and compelling urge in our inner spirit to serve at the interface of human need where our service can transform the well-being of others and the wider world. For some, this is priesthood but for others it is nursing; for some it is social work and for others the teaching profession – whatever form it takes we know when we are in that place of calling and vocation.

This theme has a particular resonance for us at this time of the year in the Methodist Church particularly given that the Methodist Conference has just met and agreed the stations for the coming year. Many ministers across the Connexion are preparing for change as they embark upon a new appointment; saying farewell to one place and preparing for introductions in a new community. In the present crisis and whilst still emerging from the conditions of lockdown; none of this will be easy or straightforward – many of the things that we take for granted on such occasions will not be able to happen in the usual way. For this reason, I would ask you all to give particular attention in your thoughts and prayers for those ministers and their families who are saying farewell in such unusual circumstances and those who are preparing to move to pastures new in equally strange times.

With Peace and Blessing, Julian