

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

September 2021

Dear Friends,

Greetings at the beginning of a new Connexional Year! Over the last week it has been a great joy and privilege to preach at two Circuit Welcome Services in different parts of the District. The inspiration this year came from the story and witness of the 14th. Century mystic, Julian of Norwich. A remarkable Medieval woman who committed her life to the calling of being an anchoress; living the life of a solitary contemplative in a walled cell attached to the Julian Church in Norwich. In a recent visit to the shrine, I was reminded that the structure of the walled cell was built in such a way that the occupant had a window looking over to the altar and a window opening out onto the medieval thoroughfare. A holy, devout woman of prayer with a window on the world and a window on the altar! I want to invite you to hold that thought / image in your mind – a window on the world and a window on the altar! A female disciple, committed to a life of holy devotion and charitable service, holding this liminal space between the altar and the world.

In the walled cell, the holy mystic, had a window overlooking the altar – she was able to behold the holy mysteries of the celebration of the sacraments – to behold the bread and wine for the life of the world and no doubt was able to hear the preaching of the word, and the reciting of the liturgy. Not a great deal of detail is known about the history of Julian of Norwich; but we do know that a window opened on to the world from her cell – on to one of the busiest thoroughfares of Medieval Norwich. From this aperture Julian gave counsel to those who sought her wisdom, gave encouragement to those who suffered and dispensed compassion to the needy souls of her day!

Here is an image or thought picture to inspire and resource our vision of contemporary ministry! What if ministry, for the whole people of God, lay and ordained, is about maintaining a window on to the altar and a window on to the world – maintaining the balance between the life of holiness (through worship and devotion) and our life of service and mission in God's world. If you like, here are two sides of the same coin – on the one hand the call to holy living and on the other the call to holy service as we turn to the world, love our neighbour, and serve the needy with compassion.

At its best the Methodist tradition has embodied this vision of holding together faith and works, devotion and service – a life of holy love anchored in God and the world. I hope and pray that each one of us will reflect carefully and prayerfully about the shape of that life and how each of us intends to keep a window on to God and a window on to the world,

With deep peace and blessing,

Julian

