

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Nostalgia, it is said, is like a grammar lesson: you find the present tense and the past perfect. In the past, churches were full on a Sunday; there were plenty of children and enough people to fulfil all the roles in the church. In the majority of cases, each church had its own minister. Churches were, in a sense, self-sufficient and although churches are part of a circuit, many may, unconsciously, have thought of themselves as congregational, in practice, at least.

But alas! All that has changed. Congregations are getting smaller; they have to share a minister with two or three or more, other churches. Younger people do not seem to want to come to church and the responsibility of maintaining the church has become more onerous.

There are several ways in which we can respond to our situation: we can hanker for the past, even though we know that we cannot ever go back where we were. We could become so overwhelmed by our difficulties that we simply sit back and wait to go down a slippery slope into oblivion.

But there is a third alternative. We could embrace our situation and do something new. This is risky and scary; it may involve some difficult decisions; it may mean giving up buildings and practices which are dear to us. But it also has the potential to breathe new life; to come closer as individuals and as churches. When a community faces a crisis, very often it works together and new relationships and opportunities present themselves.

I pray that as we embark on this new Connexional year, that we will be prepared to be creative: to build on the past but to look to the future. And unlike secular organisations, we as the church, have Christ who is the head, which means that we do not have to go it alone.

We can take courage from the writer to the Hebrews. After his extensive discussion in Chapter 11, of the biblical who's who hall of fame, he writes this at the beginning of Chapter 12. And Eugene Peterson in his translation, *The Message*, translates it thus:

“Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he ploughed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!”

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