

Methodist Recorder article by John Forsdick, Ecumenical Rep

Change is a big word, but we currently have an unexpected, unprecedented chance to see change every day, within ourselves, within our communities or within our churches. Change can be exciting and scary, but above all we need to see opportunities to think, plan and work differently as a way of turning and looking and seeing God move in new ways.

When we look at the definition of change, we see words like ‘transform’ or ‘convert’. Change is that act of becoming something different than what we were originally. In churches this might mean re-configuring a building or changing the style of worship. We can change in big ways and small ways, but the important thing is that all of these mean adopting new ways.

I am 19 and have just finished my gap year. I am now about to begin my undergraduate studies at Cliff College. Over the past few years I have experienced a lot of change and it has been an anxious time, moving out of home, choosing what subject I am going to read and deciding where I’m going to study. The reason we often find change so scary is that it forces us to face the unknown. We do not know what the change is going to look like or where it is going to take us. But if we keep God at the centre, we do not need to be scared. We know that the change we are experiencing has got God at the heart of it. We know that God’s hand of blessing is over us: so why should we be scared?

Let us not forget that change is inevitable, we should expect it. We all know that things we put off are going to have to happen sooner or later. We need to have this mentality regarding change at present: if we do not accept the need to explore different approaches and ways of thinking now, we will have to do this later down the line, perhaps a long time after we should have done it. We need to think of change as a constant process. Some things may change weekly, others may change monthly, others annually, but we need to be constantly looking for areas where we can see God prompting us to alter the ways we work in order to grow his Church as the Kingdom. This might mean changing the way we do church and the ways we worship – most importantly, within all this, we need to be listening out for what God is saying to us.

Changing with the times is a really important thing for us to do. We need not only to look at how the church around us is changing but also to understand how the culture and the society around us is changing too – and how we can be in tune and outreach more effectively involving the local community. This means seeing what people look for in a church, be that kids’ groups during the week, be that somewhere to come on a Sunday morning to come to have fun in worship together at a modern family service. And we need to be looking ecumenically and socially at what changes are happening and then pray into

those places to which God thinks we should be moving. He is calling us into new situations all the time.

We have seen many aspects of church changing during this time of lockdown, aspects that have been on the horizon for a long time. Digital church, live services, an enhanced sense of community and the growth of faith over platforms including Zoom. Churches have had to change very quickly to adapt to the current situation. As we face the future, we need to reflect on the changes we have made to understand how God is working in the heart of change and how God's kingdom grows through it. Change can seem scary but we need to embrace it and keep God at the heart of it. Let us be encouraged by the fact that change can be God-given and good.