

All Partners Consultation: Tuesday 22nd June - Remember yesterday, today.

Re-imagining in a Biblical context

Five Bible studies; five parts of the world; five questions for groups to consider...

Matthew 28: 16-20

- Bishop João Carlo Lopes (Brazil)

Guiding us through this well known text, João Carlo emphasised the actions of the commission – going, baptising and teaching – rather than simply ‘GO!’. What Jesus is doing (and bidding us do too) is what God had already done in creating all nations. Putting this in the context of the church today, he suggested that we sometimes make the mistake of forcing new disciples through the lens of a ‘church’ in order for them to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, they can join the Kingdom without the institution.

Question: *Is our major concern to build the Christian church in our own image, or are we ready to make disciples for the Kingdom of God?*

Exodus 19: 5-6 - Revd Simon Dossou (All African Conference of Churches)

Simon explained how the Hebrew words conveyed what the people of Israel had seen and understood of God’s special role in their history and emphasised their obedience in keeping the covenant. When they preserved this and proclaimed it they became an integral part of God’s very own being. The passage questioned us: have we really preserved and proclaimed what we have received from our Wesleyan heritage?

Question: *Have we been faithful to this Abrahamic covenant? Do we consider ourselves God’s treasured possessions?*

Acts 1: 6-8

- Revd Lo Lung Kwong (Hong Kong)

Placing the passage against the backdrop of Christianity in China – where there are now 13 million Protestants – it was illustrated that there are times in history of God ordained growth. Moving on to the significance of the word ‘power’, emphasised that the power of Jesus should bless, not oppress and that we

need to be empowered with the freedom to express faith, something that is still hard to do in China. There, the Bible is sensitive because it is powerful. Finally, he picked out the importance of ‘witness’ – it originally meant martyr, but we have watered it down. We are called as disciples to die for Jesus and our faith.

Question: *What does ‘witness’ mean in your own context? Where would your ‘to the ends of the earth’ be?*

Isaiah 12: 4-5

– Revd Sammy Azariah (Pakistan)

Go tell everybody what God is *doing* – not just what he’s done. God created, sustains, judges and loves the world. Showing a clip from documentary *Burning Paradise*, he showed the challenges facing his community – particularly the targeting of girls’ schools by the Taliban. This is the context in which his church is trying to live out God’s love & implement the greatest commandment. God’s forgiveness can transform society.

Question: How do we think that conforming to this world is stopping us from discerning the movement of God? What must we do to be transformed?

Romans 12: 12 - Harriet Olson (UMC, GBGM, United Methodist Women)

This verse is an appeal calling for action – to offer their bodies, stop conforming and be transformed. They needed to prove and discern God’s will. Harriet emphasised that conforming to our world’s expectations is something that we choose to do – in the same way, renewing our minds should be our choice too. Through this process of formation (whether travel, encounter or relationships) we are being transformed.

Question: *In letting the world know what God has done, is there a guilt present which needs to be removed in our re-imagining the future of the churches’ mission together?*

20:20 Vision – The Church in Ten Years Time

The afternoon looked ahead to the future – to 2020 and what our churches might look like in a decade. Again, voices from across the world were heard to provide a range of perspectives.

Revd Stephen Lindridge (Methodist Fresh Expressions Missioner, MCB)

Stephen's vision for the church in Britain stemmed from an encounter in Nigeria five years ago. He would like to see a love for the church on British streets, and a church that rides the wave of God's spirit going where it leads – all the way to shore and the completion – with an understanding that God knows best. He pointed to existing examples of this that he wanted to be more widespread in 10 years time, such as Street Pastors in every town/city. The church, through this and other means, should be meeting needs and showing God at work. Wesley's class structure would be demonstrated within networks of cell groups, providing ministry and discipleship. There would be better communication between churches; equal sharing of resources; and worship that better reflects God's glory. Ultimately, we can't stop the Spirit from building church.

Revd Hans Vaxby (Eurasia, UMC Europe)

Hans approached 2020 with a practical vision, based upon work already done in his region to prepare for the next 5 years that aims to release it from financial dependency upon partner churches. Instead, it should be 'in partnership for the purpose of: mutual learning, support and mission development'. There were three key points:

1. Make self-sustainable churches. Congregations should fund their basic running costs from the offering and apply to Connectional funds for other areas (e.g. special outreach projects). Connectional support can't be given simply to support the status quo.
2. Self-sustainable conferences.

3. Dependent in education & role-modelling – from dependency to interdependency. Like children who leave home once grown up, churches should become more independent as time passes. The church in Russia is now 19 years old – the same age as many children will leave home. He concluded with a challenge: *"we will only become a spiritually sound church when we are a financially sound church"*.

Revd Dr Joshva Raja (CSI, SOCMS)

Using two sporting analogies, Joshva shared his vision for the worldwide church. Firstly, like 20:20 cricket, mission is a 'do or die' game in which you need to get good numbers. Then there were three points which we, like the English football team, should remember:

1. Have one mind, mission mindedness. We need to be united, though not the same. Methodist traditions can remain and influence others. Be inter-connected – everywhere to everywhere.
2. Put the church in the context of others. How do we bridge gaps, like those between lay & ordained and the marginalised? Be a missionary *movement*.
3. Change the approach when necessary!

Before assembling for a massed photograph,

Revd Stephen Poxon (Secretary, MMS) reminded us of how we got to this place – with the conversion of Nathaniel Gilbert and his baptism, along with his slaves. Stephen highlighted that the first Methodist from outside Britain was an unnamed black female slave, which should act as a challenge to us to commit ourselves to the unnamed throughout the world. His final challenge was a thought on where the future might take us. Could we form a World Methodist Society?

Follow the day's events as they unfold on the consultation blog: www.allpartnersonemission.blogspot.com

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