



The Asbury Crossing: Responding to Call

Responding to Call

Revd Sonia Hicks – President of the Methodist Conference 2021/22

On the 7th of August, 1771, the Conference began at Bristol, in England. Francis Asbury wrote: **'Before this, I had felt for half a year strong intimations in my mind that I should visit America; which I laid before the Lord, being unwilling to do my own will, or to run before I was sent.'** The call to serve God wherever, whenever, is one that I too understand. I was in my final year at theological college when I read an article in the College Magazine highlighting the desperate need for ministers in the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas. The article seemed to take up the entire space on the page and I told my husband, Conrad, that I felt an urgent need to respond. When Conrad, who was also a student minister, looked at the article, it was so tiny that he wondered how it had caught my attention! But it had. A seed was sown in my heart: A seed to serve God wherever in the world I was needed. Like Asbury, we had to tell our families what we had decided to do. It was not easy as my husband was an only child, and our son was not yet a year. This would mean separating the in laws from their only son and their only grandchild. I remember still the pain etched on their faces as they absorbed our intentions.

I was so sure that God had called us to journey across the sea to a new place but, at that point, the Methodist Church in Britain declined our offer. They felt that two new ministers, not yet at the end of their theological training, were not the right people to go. It was to be a further six years before the Church accepted the call that we had felt burning in our hearts every single day. By the time we boarded an aeroplane for the Jamaica District, in the MCCA, our family had expanded by two. It was an even bigger wrench for our families in the UK, but we were determined to see where the call of God would take us.

My parents travelled from Jamaica to the United Kingdom in search of work in the late 1950s. They left rural Jamaica to help the 'motherland' as Britain struggled to rebuild itself after the Second World War. Now, I was returning to that Caribbean Island to help the Methodist Church as it struggled to cope with the exodus of skilled workers to Canada, to the United States and to Britain. Their departure left gaps in economic vibrance of that Caribbean Island and we were to plug some of those gaps in Methodism. Conrad was assigned to the Port Antonio Circuit, and I was to work with the five churches in the Manchioneal Circuit. Both Circuits were on the north coast of the island, two hours drive away from the capital, Kingston. We lived in Port Antonio, a small town, which had in the past been the first destination of holidaymakers to Jamaica. Now, the tourist industry had, on the whole, moved further along the coast to Ocho Rios



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and Montego Bay. With the tourist industry had gone many employment opportunities and the economic heart of the town. It was here, in a forgotten corner of Jamaica, that Conrad and I ministered to God's people.

As I reflect on the call to itinerancy which took me thousands of miles away from the familiarity of the place I called home, I realise that serving in Jamaica gave me many opportunities and diverse ways of serving God which I would not have received in a typically British setting. I served alongside people who, although life was hard and difficult, were prepared to serve God faithfully. But one memory stayed with me. At the welcome service, the minister who was leading the proceedings, remarked how Jamaica had watched its sons and daughters travel far away in search of jobs and opportunities. Yet, here was an occasion, when the offspring of those Jamaican sons and daughters had come to work alongside. I think that his words were true for, in me, God was giving a visual sign that God was still at work in Jamaica and that's what itinerancy is about. God showing, through people like Asbury and people like me, that God has not abandoned areas of deprivation. God cares and so should we.

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