

'The Unfinished Agenda' – Additional Report

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Following the EDI Symposium at the beginning of March, the EDI committee submits to the Council a further report continuing on from the progress report at page 137 of the papers (MC/19/44).

Further work has been undertaken on beginning to answer the 3 questions posed in the Council report to the 2018 Conference:

“What might we reasonably believe to be God’s design in bringing together, in the Methodist Church in Britain today, preachers and members of such diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds?”

1. In Ephesians 2:15, we read that it is the purpose of God to create ‘a single new humanity in Christ’. Over the past year, the EDI Committee has affirmed that the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the Connexion today, should be seen as a way of making visible this truth of a ‘single new humanity in Christ’, and a means of enabling that vision to be enacted and developed. In this way the Church fulfils its calling to be a ‘sign, foretaste, and instrument’ of the reign of God.
2. In ‘Faithful and Equal’, the Conference Report of 1987, racism is defined as ‘allowing prejudice to determine the way power is used to the personal, social, or institutional detriment of ethnic minority individuals or communities’. This runs counter to the purpose of God, and is rightly condemned as sin.
3. The Symposium convened by the EDI Committee on 1-3 March 2019, had as its theme, “Racial Justice: What is our Calling?” The planning group for the Symposium wanted to adopt an approach that would not simply add to the list of resolutions passed and policies recommended, but would help participants to discover transformational possibilities for themselves and for the whole Church.
4. It was an ambitious undertaking, and the planning group, through its own reflection and the feedback received from participants, has identified a number of ways in which the event could have been more effective and helpful. For all the participants, coming with their own expectations, this way of working was a new experience. The richness of sharing both pain and joys were at the heart of the weekend which brought the Symposium to the cusp of developing prototypes that could be tested across the Connexion. The continuing work of the EDI Committee is to develop these and find appropriate ways of sharing them across the connexion.
5. However, in spite of the acknowledged incompleteness of the Symposium, the following gains have been recognised:
 - a. We believe that this was the largest and most diverse Methodist gathering in recent years, that has spent so much time in exploring how the Methodist Church can be more truly ‘an inclusive multi-cultural community of faith’;
 - b. The focus on story-telling, and the repeated encouragement to listen intentionally and respectfully, allowed a number of the participants to broaden their awareness of the issues involved, and to develop deep relationships with people from very different backgrounds, whom they were meeting for the first time in the Symposium;
 - c. There is now, around the Connexion, a significant number of people who have gained some experience of the ‘journeying’ approach advocated by the Presencing Institute; they have also seen how specific practices of ‘Theory U’ can be used to make explicit the complexities of structures and relationships that can be hindrances, as we try to discern what it means to be ‘an inclusive, multi-cultural community of faith’ within the ‘single new humanity in Christ’;

The Connexional Team has already made an investment in this way of working through the Learning Network, and the EDI Committee hopes that in other parts of the Connexion there will be more engagement with this practice;

- d. The EDI Committee intends to make this a dimension of our further work with those who attended the Symposium, and to encourage and support the 'journeying' approach as the means of addressing two of the questions that the 2018 Conference agreed should be considered):
- *What might prevent people from diverse backgrounds from exercising leadership through engagement with the Church's committees and governance structures?*
 - *What can be learned from examples of good practice in the life of the Church with regard to inclusion and participation (eg 3Generate)?*

We see these as precisely the kind of questions that can be responded to more fully and fruitfully at the local, circuit and district level, using an exploratory journeying approach. This will lead to the forming of prototypes that can be tested and modified in specific contexts.

6. During the Symposium, several participants pointed to the parallels with the issues of equality and inclusion that were seen in relation to disability, sexuality, gender and age, and emphasised the importance of Intersectionality (that is, unfavourable treatment resulting from the overlap of various social identities). The EDI Committee, reaffirmed a commitment to further explore and develop its understanding of race and racism and how it continues to mar the life of the Church. However, the Committee also expressed its commitment to understanding discrimination more fully, and addressing it across all protected characteristics, ensuring that no false hierarchy is created.
7. The Committee recognised also that the practice of hospitality lies at the heart of what it means to be a truly multi-cultural inclusive community of faith. This must be the basis of what we should offer as the Church, both locally and connexionally, and will encourage and empower people from all areas of society to feel safe, equal and affirmed among us.
8. The 2017 Conference directed *the Methodist Council to develop and implement measurable and time bound plans that will increase participation and inclusion, and to report to the Conference of 2018 on how the plans are progressing*

The Symposium was the first stage of addressing this.

9. However, only one month has passed since the Symposium, and the EDI Committee, together with the planning group, has already met twice to begin mapping a way forward. The Committee has already begun some preliminary work on developing how to implement measurable and time bound plans that will increase participation and inclusion. Some of the ideas which are emerging are in appendix 1 to share a flavour of the direction the work is progressing.
10. One of the affirmations that came out of the Symposium was, that 'change begins with the individual' and our challenge is to find ways to bring this about within the Methodist Church so we can become a truly diverse and inclusive Church.
11. The EDI Committee would like to develop and offer 'transformative pathways' for individual members as well as groups and Committees in the Church. Using the framework of *Our Calling* we aim to help people become more aware of the particular challenges of diversity, and to respond in creative ways that will enrich our Church and the wider society.
12. It is important that the EDI Committee continues to develop the way forward with all those who were involved in the Symposium. The importance of journeying together means that we recognise that the insights we offer here are some of the indications of the direction of travel, which we shall ensure are developed through our relationship with the members of the Symposium. It is therefore recommended that there be a Symposium in the future to monitor progress on the Conference resolutions.
13. There is still much work to be done by the Committee. The Symposium was not a means of providing complete answers to the key questions that the Conference report highlighted; rather it offered a way

of deepening our understanding of the first question, and of developing a transformative framework for engaging with the remaining two.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44A/1 The Council receives the report.

44A/2 The Council recommends to the Conference that, having acknowledged the amount of work still to be done in addressing the sin of racism, the Conference acknowledges the hurt and pain that continues to be caused by racism, which results in exclusion and an unwelcoming environment.

44A/3 The Council directs the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as a matter of urgency to propose to the Strategy and Resources Committee a costed and measurable programme to take forward the work identified by the Symposium.

Appendix 1

Journeying Together: Our Calling to Fulfil

As the Committee reviewed the flip charts and notes, the photographs, feedback and particularly the initial attempts of groups beginning to envision ways forward four key questions emerged:

Where are we going? What is our journey's goal?

Who is journeying with us? How do we listen to their stories?

What are the obstacles along the way? How do we remove them?

What will sustain us as we journey towards being an inclusive multi-cultural church?

Work has begun on looking at how the 4 'Callings' can be used in each of them and at the same time embracing what is being 'rolled out' across the connexion over the next few years. This will enable us to 'dig deeper' to discover transformative ways of fulfilling our calling to be an inclusive multicultural church.

Examples of this would be

- 'The Year of Testimony'
- The increased focus on vocations and calling and how we can encourage BAME leadership at every level of the Church
- The EDI Toolkit
- Bible month
- Connexional emphasis on revisiting circuit and district mission statements
- Inter-cultural and inter-community exchange by using the Encounter Programme at
- Connexional level
- 3Generate
- Evangelism & Growth team