

### LOCAL PREACHERS

The first of the local preachers quarterly meetings in the new circuit was held in September 1899 when the meeting took the form it was to follow until the 1960's. The 14 statutory questions for the L.P. department in London were asked and answered, giving mainly numerical answers to such questions as " how many preachers have removed " or " how many are on trial " After this there was at the first meeting a paper presented on "Pulpit Presentation ".

Practical matters were not excluded however, the meeting resolving in 1900 to ask the Circuit Stewards for five shillings for tea. Later that year Maney Wesleyan Mission was welcomed to go on the Plan (of appointments for preachers) and it was agreed that a series of open air meetings should be held around Erdington, Stockland Green, Curdworth and Tyburn.

Maney proved disappointing, however, only six people appearing for services at times. A resolution was passed that " a more earnest attempt should be made to lay hold of the population ". This was, of course, at a time when many local preachers had hundreds in their congregations.

The donation of a theological library of 600 volumes was welcomed but brought problems. Where to put them? Station Road eventually found them a room, but bookshelves cost £15-10-0 and Circuit Stewards refused to pay, so gifts were solicited . More books followed, including a set of Encyclopedia Britannica. But after 1903 the library is not mentioned , except when someone having donated a set of The London Review, asked for them back, having given them by mistake.

Transport was a problem in the early days. There was a Horse Hire Fund, but it was not always convenient to use. Later a governess cart was hired on contract to take preachers from Erdington Green to Curdworth and Tyburn at a cost of 4/6d per journey. By 1933 a car service was organised to take preachers to outlying chapels.

Discipline was strict. Preachers who failed to arrive for appointments were closely questioned. One brother who failed to turn up for two quarterly meetings to explain his "neglect" of appointments was formally reported to the Superintendent, who persuaded him to arrive for the next meeting. The eloquent story of his misfortunes was such that "the matter was dropped forthwith". without a reason being recorded.

There were frequent retreats and study groups to further preachers development. One retreat organised at the Princess Alice Orphanage in 1949 was not wholly successful; "Less of the lecture room and more of the Upper Room" was one comment deploring the too intellectual programme of study.



At most meetings there was a talk or discussion after the regular business had been concluded. Subjects included "Matters of life and Death" and Personal Prayer" In the post war years ethical problems were popular such as those posed by the presumed moral laxity of the times. On abortion, drugs, and relations outside marriage one meeting admitted defeat - "members found themselves ill-equipped to discuss these matters."

One feature of the Local Preachers fellowship stands out in the record of their proceedings- the pastoral care of members. At each meeting those in any difficulties are mentioned- sickness , bereavement, family problems, and any appropriate action taken. A sincere welcome is given to newcomers- and there are a surprising number of newcomers coming to live in the circuit, particularly in the first half of the century, when the Sutton area was being developed. Equally, a number leave and are sent on their way with good wishes.

At each meeting those on trial and on note are reviewed with reports from their supervisors, and due consideration given to those recommended to be put on Note, starting on the long, and to many, arduous path to full recognition, and the day when their names appear on the Plan. There are those who fail to achieve their ambition; as for instance the man who, after 27 quarters on trial,reluctantly conceded that he was not of the standard required. Some find the task of passing the examinations too much, the years of preparation too demanding of time and commitment. And others plough steadfastly on, examinations passed, trial services approved, to the recognition service which is their reward. And then?- continuing study for most together with the joy of your name on the Plan and appointments to conduct services.

These appointments may not always be local;from time to time requests arrive for help from neighbouring circuits.Over the years our local preachers have assisted in the Lichfield circuit, Elmdon. South Derbyshire, Leominster and others. There have always been between twenty and sixty names on the Plan, and many circuits are not blessed with these numbers. One quirk that enlightens the quarterly meeting minutes is the discussion fom time to time on the arrangement of the preachers names on the Plan. At intervals of



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some years the preachers may decide that they wish their names to appear in alphabetical order, or by seniority, or with christian names, or with initials only. If the Superintendent agrees the list is duly altered next time it appears.

In the eighties Team Preaching became an accepted means of usefully using the available resources in the circuit to conduct worship. Local preachers joined with church members to conduct services over a certain period. Witton and Kingsbury have benefitted from these teams since the 1980's. The advent of Worship Leaders training in 1997 under the aegis of local preachers is a further development involving church members in conducting services.

To what extent do local preachers actually preach?. In 1973 they took 54% of the preaching appointments in a quarter. By 1998 this had reduced to 40% as the trend for Ministers to take more services in their own churches developed. And there are anomalies; for instance the L.P. of many years standing who preached once at South Parade in thirty years.

But one must have some sympathy for the plan maker; usually the Superintendent, although he may delegate the somewhat onerous job. L.P./s give lists of dates on which they are not available to preach each quarter. Similarly Ministers have occasions on which they wish to conduct worship at their church- or have already been invited to preach elsewhere, and there are occasions on which ministers from outside the circuit are invited to preach. Take into account sickness and holidays and you will see that the plan makers job is not an easy one.

A piece of legislation prompted the meeting of June 1918 to consider the position of women, and it was decided that women should be received "with proper safeguards". It was 1927 before the first woman appeared on this circuit's plan, a lady transferred from the Nottingham circuit. Others came in the ensuing years to reside locally and were accepted on plan, but the first of our church members to be placed on trial did not appear until 1947. And even in 1970 out of 47 preachers only 5 were women. It took the stimulus of the increasing part women were playing in business and public life in the 80's and 90's to bring the total of women L.P.s up to 14 out of 32 in 1998. But at that date all of the 8 people On Trial or on



Resolved:

That this Quarterly Meeting expresses its gratitude to our Local Preachers for their consecrated endeavours, unswerving courage and consistency in preaching and living the love of Jesus Christ to our Society. We do assure them that we will frequently pray to God that He may continue to bless them with His love and power, that they may spread His word, and change lives to work for Him in this district.

In connection with the Wesley Deaconess Convocation, 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April 1956 the Circuit was asked to provide and serve a buffet tea on the afternoon of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April. Homes would also be required for thirty Deaconesses during the week. Princess Alice School would provide accommodation for six.

Resolved:

That the wife of the Senior Society Steward in each Church be asked to appeal for accommodation and let Mrs Whittington know before the next meeting of the Hospitality Committee on January 18<sup>th</sup>.

Note were women. Compare this with advent of women Ministers- the first woman Minister was not invited to the circuit until 1984,.

During the century many of our local preachers offered themselves as candidates for the ordained Ministry. Some 15 succeeded in the severe selection procedure locally and nationally, but others experienced the pain of rejection. When Ministers in Local Appointment were introduced in the 80's ( living in the circuit but not itinerant ) one of our local preachers was accepted as a candidate and now after ordination is a member of the circuit staff.

And years ago Local Preachers in the circuit were formally thanked in the circuit meeting once a year- a gracious acknowledgement that seems to have disappeared!.



Minutes of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting  
held at South Parade, Sutton Coldfield, on  
Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1953.

Present:

Rev. Wm. G. Russell (in the Chair);  
 Revs. J. H. Humphries, A. R. Burch, J. Mellor, E. W. Blennerhassett,  
 W. A. Lenton, and R. S. Armsby.  
 Mr. A. Whittington (Circuit Steward) and ninety others.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. A. B. Cape, Mr and Mrs  
 A. H. Lenton, Mr. J. Spicer, Dr. Clifford Parsons, Mr. Jinks, Miss Nicholas,  
 Mr. Micklewright, Dr. Pinoff, Mrs. R. Batteley, Mr. D. J. Nicholas,  
 Mrs. Mellor, Mr. Barnett, Mr. F. Wilkinson, and Mr. W. Cooke.

Resolved:

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That a letter of affectionate greetings be sent to  
 Mr. Cape expressing our hopes for his recovery and  
 assuring him of our prayers.

Resolved:

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That our hearty felicitations be offered to Rev  
 J. H. Humphries on his appointment as Chaplain  
 to the Mayor of Sutton Coldfield.

Resolved:

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That a message of congratulations and good wishes  
 be sent to Sir Peter Bennett on his elevation to  
 the Peerage. We rejoice in the honour conferred  
 upon him which we feel to well deserved.

Resolved:

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That our hearty congratulations be offered to  
 Mr. A. Hadley on his election as Councillor  
 to the Aldridge Urban District Council.

The Meeting recorded with pleasure and deep appreciation.