

Letter from the Secretary of the Methodist Conference

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

A question asked around the year 365 continues to challenge us in every aspect of our ministry. 'Christians, where is your hope?' (Hilary of Poitiers Commentary on the Psalms 118:15,7). This is a question to be asked not simply as we begin the season of Advent, although certainly it has a place in our Advent devotions. Rather the question is posed as we, engaged in representative ministry, strive to offer the love and mercy of a creator God revealed in Christ to a world that is not always very easy to make sense of. The streets of Paris, the desolation of Aleppo, and the inhumanity of camps in Calais, each require of us some message of hope. Our daily responsibilities are no less demanding as we seek to articulate the Gospel by offering credible and hope filled words and acts to the situations of poverty and neglect that are very near to our door steps. However, there is more because those occasions and places where apparent success is close to the surface may equally require the challenge of what it is to live hopefully. That is, to really live with hope.

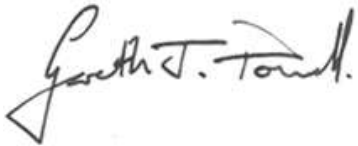
To live hopefully, to be hope filled, requires a good deal of effort and energy. The whole sweep of our inheritance makes that very clear. Even a passing observation of our history should help us to remember that as we establish and reform communities of hope so we need to be confident and we need to be able to see beyond that which is most obvious. Lifting our sights above the things which, if we are honest, can easily become rather tedious is not a denial of a given situation. Lifting our sights a little higher is to trace the promise of God's love which is always just that little bit further ahead of us than we are sometimes willing to acknowledge. The joy of our ministry, even when immersed in the least glamorous aspects of service, is that we act in hope and we act in order to build communities of hope. More than that, we live by hope. Belief in God does not ask of us to decide if we have a glass half full or half empty approach to our ministry. No amount of positive thinking (or grace for that matter) will alter the amount of liquid in the glass.

Manger, cross, tomb, bread and wine speak to us of a hope that is very much more than optimism or the vague notion that somehow we can make things better if only we try very hard. Manger, cross, tomb, bread and wine are one in that they mark the location of love, for where God is love is. That is both a simple and a hard message to proclaim, but proclaim is all we can do in the face of terror, hatred and disinterest.

'Christians, where is your hope?' Do not sisters and brothers lose heart. We reply, 'Here', because Christ Jesus is our hope and in Christ we have deep wells upon which to draw, living and celebrating the story of redemption and salvation. The reminder of St Augustine of Hippo that 'Only hope makes us Christians' (The City of God 6.9.5) is a truth we must hold to. Each of us in the very particular context of our ministry has to work at articulating what this hope means. I can only ever start that from the absolute conviction that God has called us and continues to bless us. Therefore, we live in such a way that as a hope-filled people we are alert to the reality of transformation.

We keep each other in our prayers and press on in our careful, hope-filled living.

May you know God's grace in our common ministry,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gareth J. Powell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Gareth J Powell

Secretary of the Conference