

Report on Methodists for World Mission Conference 2-4th June 2017

The theme of this year's conference at Swanwick was 'Moving People, Moving Stories' and focussed on the current situation with refugees and migrants around the world. Anne Browse and myself attended on behalf of MWiB and hopefully this short report will give you just a flavour of what we experienced over the weekend.

There were around 110 delegates staying over the weekend with some extra day visitors on the Saturday, representing churches from across the connexion and the world. This included some of the WCR team, returned mission partners and various people invited to speak on the issue of migrants and refugees. We also met two lovely ladies attending on behalf of Methodist Women in Ireland and shared some wonderful times of fellowship and laughter with them both. We also had chance to catch up with Alison Judd in between some of her travels.

Beth Leeming and Rita Bennett led a creative and interesting programme for the children in attendance and they shared with us some of what they had been doing in the final session as they retold the story of Mary, Joseph and Jesus becoming refugees in Egypt using shadow puppets.

On the Saturday and Sunday mornings we took part in a challenging Bible study led by Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal who led us via recorded video teaching sessions on the theme of 'Sanctuary.' We learned something of his own story of migration and of the work of the 'City of Sanctuary' movement and discussed various questions in small groups. We were encouraged to think of how we can give sanctuary first of all to God by inviting him into our lives, then some practical ideas on how we can offer sanctuary as individuals and as churches, and show hospitality to the stranger and the visitor amongst us.

We also heard from various people working with refugees and migrants and heard some harrowing and moving stories from Greece, Italy, Syria, Mexico and Palestine. We were also privileged to hear stories from a lovely group of young people from the Karen Community in Myanmar who are now living in Sheffield and they shared some of their songs and dancing during the Saturday evening. Anne and I had a go at the dancing but we're not sure we'll make their dance troupe! A group from Zimbabwe also took part during the Saturday evening and led us in some exuberant and joyful singing.

During the Saturday afternoon there were about eight workshops on offer, two of them led by Anne and myself. Anne shared stories of her experiences in Germany and Greece and I based mine on a workshop I had attended in Houston on Biblical hospitality which generated some lively and interesting discussion. Other workshops were led by some of the visitors and speakers including Tim Annan, Youth President sharing stories of his trip to Mexico, Laura Cook from All We Can speaking about forced migration in the Middle East and Africa, Katy Brookes-Duncan speaking about the charity she has helped to establish called 'People Not Borders' working with refugees in Greece and a group from the Living Stones of the Holy Land speaking about some

of the current issues in Syria and Palestine. As part of that we heard a moving story from a man who was born in one of the Palestinian refugee camps which brought a personal touch to the workshop.

There were several stalls with information and products from various organisations and charities and a temptation to buy a variety of wonderful things. I came home with several new books and a Nepalese Yak blanket for a family member's birthday!

The conference closed on the Sunday with a service of Holy Communion and an exhortation to make sure that we reflect on what we have learned and seek God for a way in which we can help show the love of Jesus to displaced people in our communities, nation and across the world.

Aside from all the speakers and activities, I found it a wonderful opportunity to meet with others who share a global view of the church and to fellowship with brothers and sisters from around the world and learn more of their lives.

Next year's MWM weekend will be on the theme of 'Africa – Gospel and Culture' so that promises to be full of exciting stories and worship. It will be held at Swanwick from 1 – 3 June 2018 so if you haven't been to one of these conferences before, I would encourage you to come along and experience it along with me next year.

For more information about MWM check out www.mwm.org.uk

Email mwmsec@gmail.com

Twitter @MWM_charity

Carolyn Lawrence (British Area Officer for WFM&UCW)



In one of the workshops



Anne and I with Joan and Moira from Ireland



Some of the Karen Community from Myanmar sharing a song of worship



Brothers and sisters from Zimbabwe leading us in worship