

**Welcome from the Down District
Superintendent, Rev Roy Cooper**

On behalf of the people of the Down District I give you a warm welcome to the forthcoming Methodist Conference.

This will be the first occasion for the Methodist Conference to be held in Newtownards and we have been working hard to ensure that you not only feel welcome but that you will enjoy being with us over the Conference period 9th-12th June. All roads lead to Movilla Abbey - see you there!



President 2011

Rev. Ian D. Henderson

Rev. Ian D. Henderson was born in 1946 in Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. He began his primary education at the Model School in Carrickfergus. When his father was transferred by the Yorkshire Insurance Co. in Belfast, where he worked, to Dublin in 1953, Rev. Henderson's education was continued at Wesley College, Dublin and Trinity College.

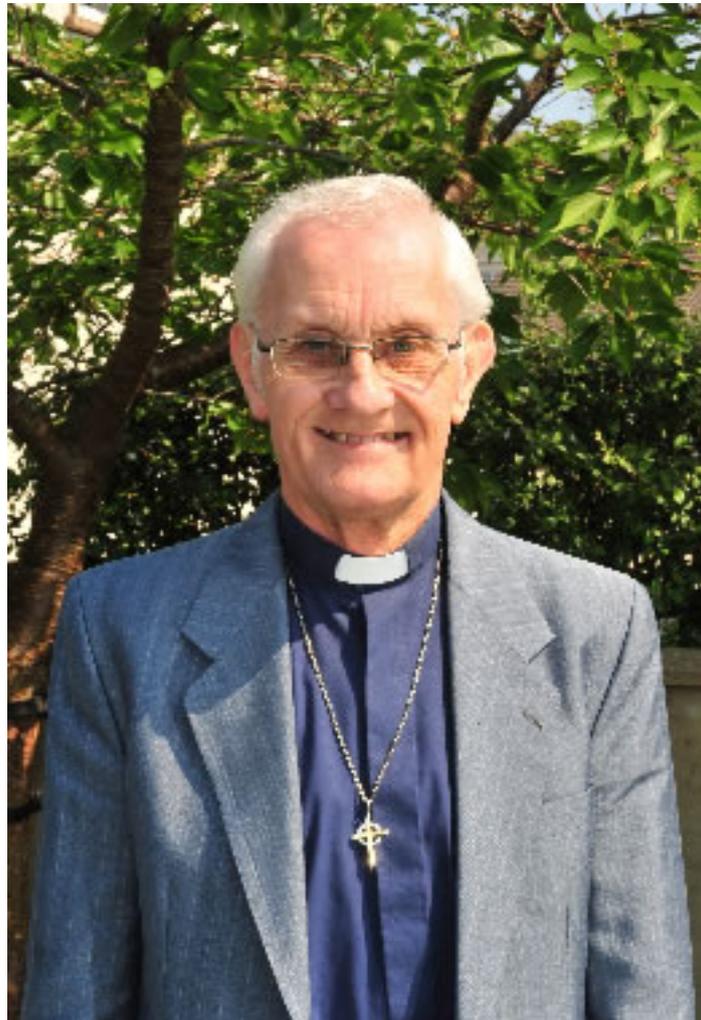
On completion of a B.A. degree at Trinity, he worked for a year in Trinity College Library while candidating for the Methodist ministry. He was accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1970 and studied at Edgehill College, Belfast from 1970-1973, simultaneously taking a B.D. degree at Queen's University.

He has been stationed on the following Circuits: Dublin Central Mission 1973-1975, Cavan & Longford 1975-1980, Wicklow, Arklow & Avoca 1980-1984, West Cork 1984-1991, North Connacht 1991-1999 and Donegal, Ballintra & Inver since 1999.

He has served as Secretary of three District Synods, Midlands & Southern 1988-1991, Lakelands 1992-1995 and North West 1999-2000. He has also served as District

Superintendent of the Lakelands District 1995-1999 and of the North West District 2000-2003 and 2010-2011 when he will take up the office of President at the Conference in June 2011. In 1999 he was elected as Journal Secretary of Conference and in 2005 took over as Senior Assistant Secretary of Conference.

He has written a number of local histories of Methodist Churches, which include Gorey, Dunmanway, Bandon, Ardara, Inver and Donegal. Other publications include "The Methodist Conference in Ireland", "The Wesleys in Bandon", "John Wesley in Sligo", and "How Methodism Came to Ireland". Further publications include two books of prayers and three volumes of hymns. He has also done extensive research on the Primitive Wesleyan Connexion in Ireland, which has not been published. In 1975 he married Rosalind Keatinge, a granddaughter of Rev. Robert T. Booth who was a medical doctor and Methodist minister (1897-1912), who served as a Mission Partner in Hankow in China. They have one daughter, who is a special needs and Montessori teacher.



LAY LEADER

Mrs Gillian Kingston BA (Mod), Lay Leader of the Methodist Conference 2011

Mrs. Gillian Kingston made history at last year's Annual Methodist Conference when she became the first person to hold the newly created position of Lay Leader of the Conference. The post lasts for a three year period.

Lay Leader's Loiterings 2010 - 2011

It has been a great privilege and joy to have walked and worked alongside the Revd Paul Kingston during this past Connexional year. Coming from the same circuit on the same District, we have had common perspectives and interests. We have shared experiences and opinions, raised eyebrows, laughed, pondered, at much the same things. It has been a great year - thank you, Paul! Here are just some of the things in which I've been involved:

- Sharing in worship with the President in the Methodist Church, Bandon;
- Attending National Ploughing Championships at Athy;
- Leading discussion at the Junior Ministers' Conference in the Emmaus Centre;
- Speaking at the North-East Local Preachers' dedication evening in Carrickfergus;
- Bringing greetings to the MWI residential Conference at Glenada;
- Chairing the General Committee with the President;
- Listening in on committees of the Connexion that I'd only read about before;
- Sharing in the RTE broadcast of the Covenant service from the Methodist Church, Adare;
- Speaking to the meeting of the retired Ministers at 'The Church on the Hill';
- Welcoming Paul and Edna on the now annual Presidential visit to University College, Dublin;
- Attending the opening of the new church in Kenmare;
- Attending the Trauma and Spirituality Conference at the Europa Hotel, Belfast;
- Leading the Midlands and Southern MWI annual residential Conference in Killarney;
- Preaching at the Whiteabbey 75th anniversary celebration service.



Thank you for all these wonderful opportunities to meet people and to share in significant events!
Blessings,

Gillian

Gillian's Profile:

Married to the Rev. Tom Kingston, Gillian, a graduate of Trinity College Dublin with a BA (Mod) in English Language and Literature, has been a teacher, an assistant to the Methodist Chaplain, Trinity College, and is currently a Chaplain at University College Dublin.

Mrs. Kingston has a great variety of experience in the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland, serving as a member of the General Committee and also previously as Convenor of the Faith and Order Committee. Gillian is a member of the Covenant Council of the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland (formerly its Honorary Secretary) She has served as a member of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission (1986-2006) Mrs. Kingston was the Chair of Programme Planning Committee for the World Methodist Conference, Seoul, South Korea (July 2006). 'From 1995-1997, Gillian was all-Ireland President of the Methodist Women's Association, taking the theme 'To work and speak and think for Thee'.

Gillian Kingston's work on behalf of the Christian Church is not confined to Methodism. She is a former President of CTBI (Churches Together in Britain & Ireland) and Moderator of Church Representatives Meeting of CTBI. A Co-Chair of the Theology Forum of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, she is also a Past President of the Irish Council of Churches and co-Chair (with Cardinal Brady) of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

The Lay Leader elect is also a Member of the Trustees Board of Christian Aid (GB/Ireland), Christian Aid (Ireland), Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Since 2008 she has been Director of the Glenstal Ecumenical Conference
Gillian has four grown-up children.
She lists her interests as music, reading, art, theology, country life.

Sermon preached by the newly installed President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev Ian D Henderson

MOVING FORWARD IN CHRIST

I was sitting in a guesthouse in Belfast last January having breakfast. There were three men sitting eating breakfast together at an adjacent table. We were in such close proximity, that I couldn't help overhearing their conversation.

One of the men started telling the other two about an American tourist who was visiting Donegal, who stopped to ask for directions from one of the locals. The tourist was told, "Well, you go up there and turn right, right? Then take the next left, right? At the T-junction, don't turn left, right? Turn right, right? And it's right up there on your left, right?" And of course they were all laughing at how confused the American tourist would have been.

I was of course smiling to myself as I listened and I was praying that, as they left the dining room, they would ask me, "And where would you be from?" - to which I would have replied, "I'm from Donegal, right? They probably wouldn't have believed me and thought I was taking the mickey. Sadly they didn't ask me!

My theme for this year is, "Moving Forward in Christ". But before you can, or should move forward, it is important to know where you are!

At the bottom of Quay Street in Donegal Town, there is a tourist information map, displayed in a glass case on the pavement. It's a street map of the town and on it there is a red arrow pointing to the exact spot at which you are standing as you look at the map. On the arrow are the words, "You are here!" So it helps you to know where you are in relation to where you want to go.

When I was returning home from the World Methodist Council in Sydney in 2007, the final leg of my journey was by bus from Dublin airport to Donegal Town. I dozed off for a few minutes and when I woke up and looked out the window to see where I was, I discovered the bus was stopped outside the Abbey Hotel in Donegal Town. My few minutes doze had lasted for four hours. But at least I was where I wanted to be - home!

Are you where you want to be? Is the Church where it wants to be? More importantly are we, as God's people in Ireland, at a place where *Jesus wants* and *needs* us to be? As His Church, as individuals called to serve him, we need to be on the move - moving forward in Christ!

1.MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH

In our desire to move forward, I want to suggest two areas where we need to do so. The first is *faith*. We need to move forward in faith.

Professor Daniel Dennett is Professor of philosophy at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts. According to the internet, "he is one of the leading thinkers of our time". I don't know him personally, but I heard him being interviewed on the radio by Pat Kenny last

January, following a lecture he had given the previous night in Dublin. The subject of the lecture was, "Taking the Place of Religion".

His main thesis was that we need to believe in belief. What we need is a religion without faith, without any creed, without any belief system. We simply need people to hold on to all those things which give them a "feel good factor" about themselves and the world.

So, in religious terms, he said, we should encourage people to sing hymns, compose music, engage in prayer, fellowship and good works, so long as we don't have faith! So Professor Dennett's message is, "Let's replace faith with whatever gives you a 'buzz'. Let's move forward without faith".

I want to say a resounding 'No way' to that thesis. I want to call the Church to move forward *in* faith - and not just any old faith, but *faith in Jesus Christ*.

(a) *Faith as Belief*

The word "faith" in the New Testament is used in two senses. It is used to mean the *faith of the Church* - that is Christian belief and teaching, based on the Scriptures and summarised in the creeds. I believe we need to grow in that faith, in our understanding of Biblical truth, about what we believe and why.

When I was a student at Edgehill, a group of us were taken to visit a factory in Lisburn. The company manufactured valves for all kinds of tyres. The tour began with a talk from the Managing Director in the boardroom, where we were told about the company's success and ethos. One of the things that was emphasised was that every single employee was very content in the job. The workplace was a happy place.

Then we were given a tour of the factory floor and at the end of the manufacturing process was a lady, whose job was to sit all day at the end of conveyor belt and watch these valves moving past her, scanning them for imperfections and removing the ones with flaws. One member of the group asked her, "Are you happy at your work"? Her reply was, "We're supposed to be"!

As the people of God, we're supposed to know what we believe. We're supposed to be able to articulate the Christian faith. Yet if we are honest, how many of us would feel at home or really that comfortable if we were put on the spot? We might say, "Well, that the job of the minister, or that's the job of the staff of Edgehill, or that the job of the learned academics who write books"!

But 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you" - the hope *you have in you*! So it is to explain why you believe in Jesus. It is not to expound the latest trends in theological thinking or to write an academic dissertation on the theories of the atonement, or whatever. The disciples were not experts in theology when Jesus sent them out on the preaching tours. So we are simply meant to be able to give an account of our own faith journey, our faith story of what we believe and why.

And like our school reports - well mine at least, where the teacher frequently commented, 'could do better' or 'room for improvement', - there is always the need for us to grow in faith. In his letter to the Ephesians (4:13), Paul refers to the need for them to reach a mature

understanding of the faith so that they will not be misled by every new idea and led astray by false teaching. We need to grow in our understanding of Christian truth.

(b) *Faith as Trust*

The second meaning of the word faith in the New Testament is *trust*. This is at its root an individual, personal faith in Jesus Christ, which is *the* crucial factor in our relationship with God. Jesus said, "No-one comes to the Father, except through me" (John 14:6).

During the years of the so-called "Celtic tiger", if you remember them, there was a growing faith throughout our land. It was a confidence in institutions and material things that turned out to be misplaced. Thomas Wentworth was Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1633-1639. He managed to alienate both the parliament in Dublin and subsequently in England. When he learned that King Charles I had given in to parliamentary pressure to have him executed, he said, "Put not your trust in princes".

Have we not done likewise? Have we not put our trust in national politicians when they told us they knew what they were doing? Did we not put our trust in property developers to build their bigger barns in the belief they could fund them? Did we not put our trust in the banks to help people build their dreams of a lifetime believing they would be a reality for ever. Did we have put our trust in those economists who told it would go on getting better and better, even though there were some voices shouting "Stop"! But we didn't want to hear.

And we still trust that we will get out of the mess. The EU and IMF won't allow our economy to go down the tubes! Our difficulties will be over by 2015 if we just hold our nerve! The new government will save us! (Indeed all elected MLA's and TD's have a moral responsibility to do so). But will this new faith also prove to be misplaced?

As the Methodist Church, we genuinely wish the governments in both jurisdictions well as they tackle these problems. We express our solidarity with people who are struggling economically with the new stringencies that have been and will be imposed. We are empathetic with those businesses that can't get paid what is owed to them or can't get loans to grow their business.

But as a Church, we also want to remind people of Jesus' words, "A person's life is not made up of the things he/she owns" (Luke 12:15). Our economic situation may have led some to question the values on which the foundation of their lives have been built. Scripture says Jesus is *the* one and only foundation for life. No other foundation can be laid that has lasting value. We need to grow in our commitment to and faith in Jesus.

2.MOVING FORWARD IN MISSION

In the Church we used to talk about "maintaining a witness". But it seems that this kind of thinking is now frowned upon and the word "maintenance" is banned from the Church's vocabulary. This is because "maintenance" is a word that suggests something static, immobile, even immovable. Rather the Church wants to encourage the idea of "mission" or even "vision", which are good Biblical words, suggesting a moving forward.

Our "mission/vision" statements point to where the Church would like to be, even if it hasn't yet arrived. It suggests a moving forward towards a goal, a moving out beyond the cloistered

walls of a building or institution into the community to proclaim the gospel and make the message of Christ relevant and real for people - to make it a message, not just for those who know it and understand its implications, but for those who don't know it or understand it, or even worse, those who don't want to know or care that much about it. So mission is all about challenge, challenge to those inside the Church to get out there and challenge to those outside the Church to come in.

But I do not want the Church to dismiss maintenance ministry or lose sight of its value. The Church owes an enormous debt of gratitude to so many faithful people who "maintain", yes, maintain the Church. Some do so quite literally in terms of its fabric, its bricks and mortar, keeping it clean, tidy and in repair, often in the background and at personal financial cost, even sacrifice.

There are those who maintain a witness through teaching Sunday school, running youth organisations and activities, where there might be just one or two children or young people of the same age or just a few over a range of different ages.

There are those who play the music for Sunday services where there are few to sing and just maybe fewer to sing in tune! Are these not people who maintain an important and valuable witness in the Church.

In 1931 the last resident minister in the active work served in Galway. For the next seventeen years until 1948 it was served by a retired minister, when responsibility for the work there passed to other Circuits. It was to be another thirty years before a minister in the active work was to be stationed in Galway in 1977. I can still remember that minister coming to the Circuit where I was stationed and telling us that prior to its facelift when the people came to worship, the first thing they did was kick the organ to remove the mice living in it during the week. Yet they maintained a faithful witness that enabled the eventual rejuvenation of the cause.

The command of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection appearances in the upper room was, "Wait"! "Do nothing until the Holy Spirit comes upon you"! "Don't head off on your own"! The 1859 Revival in Ulster is generally traced back to four men, James McQuilken, Jeremiah Meneely, John Wallace and Robert Vance, who began meeting in an old school house near Kells, Co. Antrim in 1857, to pray for their neighbours and friends. Nothing happened for three months and then only one person came to faith, the following year only two more came to faith. They could have given up thinking it was a waste of time, but gradually a revival took off and spread to other places.

The poet, John Milton, at the end of his poem, "On His Blindness", says, "They also serve who only stand and wait". When we can't move forward, is it because we have lost our way? No! It's simply that we haven't learned the meaning of "kairos" - God's timing! We need to recognise that time and be patient.

We have all been stuck in a traffic jam from time to time. You have no alternative to wait until the vehicle in front moves forward. Sometimes it will only be a few metres at a time. But you know that eventually you will be able to move forward.

Or if you are stuck on the M1 on the inside lane at the Sprucefield or Lisburn exits around 9a.m. and you see the outside lane moving freely, there is a temptation to change lanes and

hope you can cut across back into the inside lane further on. Sometimes in the Church we need patience to move forward in God's time.

Some of my colleagues will remember Ellie Graham on the Cavan & Longford Circuit. One day I suggested to her that we might have a monthly cottage meeting in her home to which she readily agreed. She would go out on her bike during the week and invite all the neighbours to come and then provide a huge supper for them all afterwards. At that stage, her home had no electricity, no carpet, just a stone flag floor in the kitchen and one of the old black Stanley ranges. For the service she would light a tilly lamp and put on the table beside my chair while the rest of her neighbours sat in the shadows.

Over the years I was stationed there she had carpet put down on the floor and gas lighting installed fed from a cylinder of gas, with a fire in the range that would melt the snow in the Antarctic. It was only years later I was told that that cottage meeting went on for over 20 years. Ellie was involved in mission long before our Church rediscovered the meaning of the word.

So the Church has reason to be grateful to all the "Ellies" of this world, who sustain a witness, who maintain a cause, who persevere in service in order that in God's time the Church can move forward. Let us in our enthusiasm avoid the danger of following our own interests, rather than the will of God for his Church, which Jesus promised he would build.

Let us encourage those who have a vision. Let us also encourage those who haven't yet received one. Let us encourage those who are struggling in their desire to move forward but haven't yet worked out where God is leading them.

Back in 1748, Charles Wesley arrived in Ireland for his second and last visit to our land. He arrived at Tyrrell's Pass only to find a "poor neglected Society" because the preachers stationed there had abandoned it for the more encouraging work in Cork. What would happen if we all decided to do that today - to concentrate all our resources on a few places where it is all happening and write off those places and people where some committee decides it isn't?

People and Churches are at different points on the road of faith. So it doesn't mean that the ones who are further on, are the only ones worth bothering about and that we simply abandon the stragglers. In 1976 in a marathon run from Marathon to Athens in Greece, the last person to finish did so in a time of 7 hours 33 minutes long after the rest of the field. He was 98 years old! Some people need a little more time in travelling the road of faith and we need to make allowances for them.

Maintenance is mission. It is your mission to remain where God has put you. Just because the work may not appear to be as challenging as in other places; just because your Circuit is never mentioned on a Home Mission brochure does not mean that the mission is not vital and worthwhile. There might not be the same "buzz", in your Church, there might not be the same numbers and organisations, it might even seem routine and mundane, but it is still God's work, it is still God's mission, with its God-given opportunities and responsibilities. And we are in this work together wherever we are!

Yes, there may be a time to die in order that others may live - a time to move on when the mission has fulfilled its purpose. That can be painful and disappointing. It may even feel like we are letting past generations down who invested so much time and effort in the

cause. But it may also be a more fulfilling dawn to allow God to use us and our resources elsewhere for the growing of his Kingdom.

So I want to call this Church to *faithfulness* in mission, to perseverance. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I sowed the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but God made the plant grow". He says, "I laid the foundation, someone else is now building on it". Sometimes in our work for the Lord, we are unaware of what God is working towards, what the end result will be. But we are called to faithful perseverance in order that God's will may be fulfilled.

There is a poem I learned at school - obviously not very well because I can't remember what it was! But I do remember it was about climbing a mountain and when you thought you had finally reached the top you discovered there was a higher peak above to be climbed.

Sometimes it is hard to move forward because it is scary to move into the unknown and unfamiliar and leave our comfort zone. Sometimes we are not ready to move forward because we haven't dealt with issues, needs, problems and responsibilities. Sometimes like a jigsaw puzzle, we can't put the piece in the place we want to because there is another piece that needs to go in first. And the danger is we try to force in the bit we want where it doesn't belong.

That is why the most important words in my theme are *in Christ*. Unless we are moving forward *in Christ*, unless the Holy Spirit is setting the agenda, then if we are going anywhere, it is in the wrong direction, down a cul-de-sac.

As the people of God let us step out in faith. Let us take a risk for mission. Is God saying to his Church in the words of the Abba song, "Take a chance on me?" You and I know that taking a chance on God is not a risk at all.

But there are two important principles involved in this journey of faith. The first is the *Gamaliel principle*. Peter and some of the other apostles were brought before the Jewish Council and accused of preaching about Jesus and blaming the Jewish Council for his murder, which of course was quite true. They became so incensed with the apostles that they threatened to kill them. However Gamaliel said to the Council, "Hang on a minute, if what they are doing is to make a name for themselves, it will fail, but if it is of God, it cannot fail.

The second principle is the *Gethsemane principle*. "Not my will but yours be done", said Jesus as he faced the agony of crucifixion. If we truly want what God wants, if our desire is to discover God's purpose for our own lives, the Church and our land, then let's go for it. Even if the end result of our endeavours turns out to be something light-years from anything we ever imagined, God's Spirit will lead us through.

Are we ashamed of the gospel? Are we embarrassed by the gospel? Of course we're not! So let us as God's people move forward in renewed faith, hope and love. Let us *move forward in Christ* in order to achieve his will.