

## 54. Managing Trustees of the Methodist Central Hall Westminster

<b>Contact name and details</b>	The Revd Nigel Cowgill Chair of the Trustees nigel@methodistlondon.org.uk
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### Introduction

This report from the Managing Trustees gives an overview of the varied activities and events that have been part of the life of Methodist Central Hall Westminster (MCHW) during 2022-23. The worship and mission of the Church is steadily rebuilding following the challenges of the pandemic, the Congestion Charge, and a backlog of events, like marathons, taking place in Westminster. Nevertheless, we are resilient and determined, working in partnership with others where we can, including Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, other Churches Together in Westminster, St Vincent's Family Project, Westminster Foodbank, The Passage, and Premier Media Group. We are seeing the fruit of our becoming a 'Global Christian family following Jesus at the heart of London'.

The Hall was still in debt by £3.0 million as of 31 August 2022 and although the future remains challenging, the revenue generated by our Business Centre has increased, whilst we have maintained our values and mission. The Trust has been self-financing since its establishment in 1994 and has not received any financial support from the Connexion in this time.

### Ministry of the Church

In October 2022, MCHW celebrated our 110<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary and former Superintendent, the Revd Martin Turner, was our guest preacher, and we had an Anniversary meal with 220 guests.

It was an honour for the Church to work alongside our business and events team to provide a place of welcome to global broadcast organisations as we became a media centre for Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and the Coronation of King Charles III, with broadcasts reaching billions of people worldwide. The ministerial team have also been involved in a variety of broadcasts ranging from BBC Radio 2, Premier, TBN, ABC, and online. Our YouTube channel continues to serve the Connexion and the World Church, reaching a potential audience of over 1,000,000 last year. Our popular online services alone are consistently reporting 1,000 viewers per week. Our website (mchw.live) is a thriving hub of activity, with over 2,500 people visiting weekly and we welcomed over 45,000 new visitors this year. Our Easter Day in person congregation was our strongest this year, with over 300 people in attendance. Church members are in good heart, and it is encouraging to see tourists returning and new congregants.

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The Parliamentary Covenant Service, hosted by MCHW, returned to the St Mary Undercroft Chapel at the Palace of Westminster in January. We are also hoping to revive the Methodist Parliamentary Fellowship this year. We seek to engage with social justice issues, and we are registering to become part of the EcoChurch community. Other regular groups, activities, and events have returned, including our Christmas Broadcast services on Premier Christian Radio, Daffodil Day (now on a Saturday), and our Healing Conference. We have also hosted Alpha Courses, Bible Studies and a Lent course, all via Zoom.

We have a supportive staff team covering the Church Office, Healing Ministry, Young Adults, Digital Media, Music, and Finance. Our Visitor Services department, which closed during the pandemic, is currently offering weekly tours of the building, together with a new initiative 'Archives for Mission'. Our Organ Matinee concerts (3rd Sunday of the month), continue to attract a faithful audience of up to 60 and feature a range of performers, occasionally including other instruments alongside the organ. Cultural Praise, Jazz Vespers, and Songs of Praise-style services are all strands of our worship and music outreach.

The Trust's grant to the Church has increased but remains reduced from what it was pre-Pandemic: £180K for 2022/23 (pre-Covid it was £260K). This continues to impact MCHW's resources, which we have accommodated from our contingency fund. The congregation has been encouraged to increase its giving to help meet the challenges and move forward with a Kingdom Agenda. The Church continues to rejoice at God's provision.

### **Our Business Centre**

The year to 31 August 2022 was challenging for Central Hall Westminster Ltd (CHW). We continued to be impacted by Covid restrictions in place for much of the first half year. Although legal restrictions on our conference activities were lifted in January 2022, public and corporate confidence to book large scale events has taken some time to return. Nevertheless, we achieved revenues for the year to 31 August 2022 of £5.5m, in line with our forecasted revenue reported last year. This is an exceptional achievement considering the restrictions that we faced and the loss of 50% of our workforce in the prior year.

Our budget for the current year to 31 August 2023 is for revenue across our three sites of £9.2m, just under pre-pandemic levels. Continued reluctance of clients to book meetings and conferences in advance, reflecting concerns over public health conditions and the availability of public transport in the capital, impacted our first half year. On a positive note, our traditional corporate conference client base has largely been replaced with social events such as graduation ceremonies and concerts including the very successful

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series of Candlelight concerts. As previously mentioned, we were also chosen by many of the world's media as their base for the broadcasting of the late Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and welcomed them again for the Coronation.

Since its incorporation in 1999, CHW has generated nearly £20m for the Trustees. This is used by the Trustees to fund an annual grant to MCHW to further the mission of the Methodist Church and to ensure the upkeep of our Grade 2\* listed building, beyond immediate repairs and maintenance. We anticipate reaching our revenue targets for the current year but, like many Methodist churches throughout the country, are faced with the enormous cost of heating, lighting, and maintaining our beautiful building. In the short to medium term, we face a challenge to deliver the level of profits we saw pre Covid.

We continue to manage building and commercial activity on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Methodist Church and Central Methodist Church York; collectively we market our commercial operations as 'Central Hall Venues' (CHV). Our ability to drive revenues and therefore profits in both Edinburgh and York have been similarly impacted by Covid and staffing level constraints.

Our desire to build a larger network with other Methodist churches for mutual benefit, sharing of expertise and resource, has taken a back seat during these difficult times. As part of our 2023 strategic review, we will be exploring the different options available to us to develop our CHV brand to best support the mission of the Methodist Church.

### **The Building**

The Quinquennial Inspection in April 2022 noted that the Hall is well maintained and in good condition. We are working through the list of recommendations for immediate action. A further report in October 2022 looked at the condition of our plant and equipment; it highlighted several essential equipment upgrades/replacements that had been postponed due to the pandemic and financial restrictions. The most significant item is the Goods Lift which we aim to refurbish next January. We are continuing a programme of proactive maintenance, but keeping capital expenditure restricted. A comprehensive maintenance programme is scheduled for future years.

Central Hall Westminster remains fully compliant with all health and safety and building and environmental regulations. We recognise that our operations have a local and global environmental impact, and so we are committed to reducing this as much as possible by following sustainability best practices, and proactively encouraging sustainability wherever we have influence. We also have a robust Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy in place and hold a Platinum Venue Award from EcoSmart with Greengage Solutions.

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### Financial Situation

For the year 2021/22 our revenues were 60% of pre Covid levels as our business was being rebuilt. Taking the Trust and its trading subsidiary CHW Ltd combined, there was a loss of £0.4m; this followed losses of £0.7m in 2019/20 and £2.2m in 2020/21 when we were closed under Covid restrictions. At 31 August 2022 our bank borrowings were £3.0m and our agreed bank loan and overdraft facilities were £3.9m.

During 2022/23 revenue has increased and should be approaching pre Covid levels. However, the impact of higher energy prices and interest rates means that any surplus will be smaller than the £0.5m we typically achieved pre Covid. The next two years from now will be testing and thereafter loan repayments will reduce. HSBC remains very supportive as we continue to depend on the performance of our conference and events business.

### The Trustees

The role of Chair of the Trustees is held by the Revd Nigel Cowgill as one of the Chairs of the London District. The Nominations Committee continues to work to ensure that the Trustee body includes committed individuals with relevant skills and experience, particularly in the areas of finance, legal affairs, heritage architecture and Methodist mission, along with appropriate diversity in its membership. We continue to explore the possibility of looking to becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to protect the Trustees from any personal liability.

### The Future

The ongoing community engagement of the Church demonstrates a Methodist commitment to an outward oriented mission with God's love at its heart. The Trustees are seeking to work collaboratively with both Church and Company to ensure the future viability of Methodist Central Hall Westminster in providing a beacon of Methodist Christian mission and presence at the heart of London. In the past, our aim has been to remain self-sufficient financially, as we have until this time, but we are dependent on the success of our conference and events business.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**54/1. The Conference adopts the Report.**

**54/2. The Conference appoints the following Managing Trustees of the Conference Property at Central Hall Westminster:**

## 54. Managing Trustees of the Methodist Central Hall Westminster

The Revd Nigel Cowgill (Chair of the Managing Trustees and Convenor – ex officio)  
The Revd Anthony D Miles (Superintendent, London Westminster – ex officio)  
# Mr Nevil Tomlinson (Treasurer to the Trustees)  
Mr Bala Gnanapragasam (Secretary to the Trustees)  
\*# Mrs Ama Ackah-Yensu  
Ms Ruby Beech  
Mr Alan Eccles  
\* Mr Wesley Gibbs  
Mr Martin Lougher  
\* The Revd Lansford Penn-Timity  
\* Mrs Judith Mitchell  
Dr Joanna Williamson  
The Revd Andrew Harper

*\* Indicates the people nominated by the Westminster Circuit Meeting.*

*# Indicates Trustees who have served for 6 years or more*

### **Reasoned Statements for Trustees who have exceeded six years of service**

**Mr Nevil Tomlinson** – a trustee and Treasurer since 2017, he works closely with CHW management to guide us through the challenges caused by Covid and the ensuing indebtedness.

**Mrs Ama Ackah-Yensu** – a trustee since 2017, she is Treasurer of the Westminster Church and Circuit and makes the important financial connection between the Church and the Connexional Trustees.

### **Reasoned Statements for new Trustees as from 1 September 2023**

**Mrs Judith Mitchell** – a previous Trustee and member of the Hall Fabric Committee.

#### **The Revd Andrew Harper**

Andrew is responsible for all matters related to the ethical thought leadership and ethical performance of Epworth and the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church. Andrew will bring to the Trustees practical experience of working within the faith communities, the charity sector, the wider investment community and a deep understanding of the theology of investment coupled with a love for the Methodist Church.