

Reaffirming *Our Calling*: Strategic Developments

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Status of Paper	Discussion

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This discussion paper responds to the conversations at the CLF, SRC and the Council which followed the presentation of the Statistics for Mission to the 2017 Conference. It outlines the challenges faced by the Church and offers some thoughts as to a way forward.
Main Points	A The Church in Mission B. The challenges faced by the Methodist Church today C. A way forward for the Methodist Church D. To serve the present age: resourcing a connexional life
Consultations	The Connexional Leaders' Forum will discuss this paper at its meeting in January 2018. The timescales involved mean that the Council will be updated with the response from the CLF by way of an oral report at its meeting in January 2018.

Reaffirming *Our Calling*: Strategic Developments

Introduction

Sanctify us, Lord, and bless,
Breathe thy Spirit, give thy peace;
Thou thyself within us move,
Make our feast a feast of love.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

What follows is a contribution to the ongoing conversation about the work of God. Based on recent conversations it goes on to gather together the main points of reflection at the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Methodist Council in the course of this connexional year. To undertake consideration of the work of God is to participate in a long standing and venerable Methodist tradition. At one time a number of bodies in the life of the Connexion were bidden to do so in the formal agendas of a number of meetings. Not for the first time, it is important to recover that habit and to attend to the claim of God upon us as a people raised up to spread scriptural holiness across the land.

What has become clear since the triennial membership returns were presented to the 2017 Conference (*Conference Agenda 2017*, item 42) is that there is a willingness to reform as part of a response to the changing demographic of the Methodist Church. This willingness requires careful attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that the Methodist Church is faithful and hopeful as it participates in God's mission. As ever, there is an urgency in paying attention to the call of God. Such urgency is not to jump to hasty decisions, undertaking new work as if there were no heritage to build upon. Rather we have to attend to our call to be God's people with conviction and clarity. Set out in section A of this paper are some of the fundamental elements of our connexional life – that is *Our Calling*, the nature of mission as we understand

it as the Methodist people, and the role of Circuits and Districts in enabling and sustaining that mission. Subsequent sections are a drawing together of the challenges we face; a summary of the work we have set ourselves to since the Conference; and an account of the work that is either underway, or has been identified as being of some urgency.

A. THE CHURCH IN MISSION

1. In 2000 the Methodist Church, after a consultation on the purpose of the Church adopted the statement *Our Calling*.

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

The Church exists to:

- ***Increase the awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love (Worship)***
- ***Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care (Learning and Caring)***
- ***Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice (Service)***
- ***Make more followers of Jesus Christ (Evangelism)***

(Our Calling Conference Report 2000)

2. *The Methodist Church is committed actively and intentionally to work towards a world transformed by the love of God, sharing the love of God and celebrating its place within a worldwide family. (SO 1000(2))*
In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Through the Church, the body of Christ, within which the Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place, God seeks to reconcile the world itself into a unity with Christ. In this mission, necessarily undertaken both locally and globally, the vocation of the Church is to be a sign, witness, foretaste and instrument of the Kingdom of God. (SO 1000(1))
3. *Mission carries a holistic understanding; the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel in the word, deed, prayer and worship and every day witness of the Christian life. Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission focusses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and discipleship. (From the World Council of Churches (WCC) statement 2000 and used in the Future Mission Together report to the 2012 Conference)*

The Methodist Church actively engages in "this mission which lies at the heart of the nature, identity and self-understanding of the Church." (SO 1000(3))

4. After discussions within the Church the Conference affirmed certain *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (2004) recognising that "the Conference will have to review the priorities from time to time in light of experience."
5. **Nature and Purpose of the District:** *The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns. (SO 400A(1)).*
6. **Nature and Purpose of the Circuit:** *The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission and mutual encouragement and help. It is in the Circuit that presbyters, deacons and probationers are stationed and local preachers are trained and admitted and exercise their calling. The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit to churches of other denominations*

and to participation in the life of the communities served by the Circuit, including local schools and colleges, and in ecumenical work in the area including, where appropriate, the support of ecumenical Housing Associations. (SO 500(1))

7. The life, witness, service and wellbeing of the Methodist Church is experienced and made a reality at the level of the Districts and Circuits. It is here that support, and encouragement must be given if the Methodist Church is to have inspiration and hope and be reenergised for mission to face the challenges of today. Future activities should focus on the mission plans of these units and the Connexional Team should support the Circuits and Districts in these plans so that the whole Church can respond enthusiastically to *Our Calling*. Each District and Circuit should be equipped and resourced to create and update their mission plans and be supported in the implementation of these plans. In reaffirming *Our Calling* throughout the Connexion there is an urgent need for the Circuits to be the primary place for the engagement with the components of *Our Calling*. Circuits and Districts need to consider the use of resources (including both buildings and people) and what risks they will take to fulfil *Our Calling* in each particular context.

B. THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE METHODIST CHURCH TODAY

8. The recent Statistics for Mission report (*Conference Agenda 2017*, item 42) and wider discussions in the Church have recognised the following challenges faced today:
 - 3.5% year on year decline over the decade to 2016 (less than 200,000 members today). 100,00 membership and worship attendance lost in 12 years
 - Low acceptance of candidate numbers (23 in the last connexional year)
 - Ordained ministry being spread thinner and thinner
 - Lack of experience in the task of evangelism and loss of confidence in speaking of the Gospel
 - Viability of smaller churches and circuits in question
 - Age profile of membership and public worship attendance is heavily skewed towards an older demographic with relatively large numbers above seventy years. There is a missing age group of about 20 to 45 years in the congregations.
 - Too many church properties that are underused, old and in a poor state of repair
 - Churches not taken too seriously by the public and the media and a growing secularisation of Britain (more people say they do not believe in God than say they are Christian)
 - Changing reality of Britain that is now multicultural, multi faith, multi ethnic, and very diverse and where poverty, inequality and discrimination are severe problems
 - The difficulty in finding and keeping volunteers to serve the church at various levels including lay leadership, committees and stewardship roles.

C. A WAY FORWARD FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH

9. These statistics and concerns have been shared and discussed at recent meetings of the SRC, the CLF and the Council. Responses to the statistics from the Districts were shared at the Conference and made available to the CLF and Council. The culmination of the reflections at CLF and Council was to agree that **reaffirming of *Our Calling* should be the primary strategic driver for the whole Church**. The meetings felt this to be a considered response to the promptings of the Spirit.
 - 10. Priority areas agreed for focus in the context of responding to and reaffirming *Our Calling* and which needed attention by the Church were
 - To support and development of District and Circuit mission plans
 - To make more followers of Jesus Christ through mission and evangelism
 - To grow the number, variety and breath of vocations
 - To help members deepen their faith and to put their faith into action (discipleship)
 - To develop the property of the Church to support mission and evangelism

- To be a more inclusive and welcoming Church
- To evaluate and revise decision making processes of the Church so that they are effective and efficient enabling the Church to pursue its commitment to mission
- To enable the Church to be a good neighbour, especially to people in need, to be prophetic and to challenge injustice
- To ensure the Church fulfils its regulatory and good oversight responsibilities in key areas

11. In the development of these areas it was agreed that certain guiding principles and values core to the Methodist Church must undergird any development of priorities. These principles are as follows:

- **Connexional Church:** The sense of being connected to a wider community throughout (at local church, circuit and district level) provides a sense of belonging and common purpose. This enables mutual support and the sharing of resources at times of need. In the sharing of resources and of experiences it is important that Local Churches and Circuits have sufficient flexibility to make decisions in order to be responsive to the needs of the local communities (the principle of subsidiarity). Whilst making decisions they also require access to the wider experience of the whole Connexion.
- **Working in Partnership:** Wherever possible the Methodist Church will work in partnership with others at all levels and in many areas.
- **Inclusive Church:** The Methodist Church must be an inclusive and diverse community where all are welcome and the needs of the weak and vulnerable are recognised. Leadership throughout the church should reflect this and be inclusive.
- **Teamwork and cooperation between the lay and ordained members:** The complementary roles of lay and ordained are essential to the decision making process and the oversight of the Methodist Church.
- Recognise and **accept that the Methodist Church is smaller today** and that it must therefore behave like one that has c. 180,000 members. This means that structures, decision making processes and ways of working need to be adapted.
- **Prepared to set priorities:** The Methodist Church needs to take decisions to set a few priorities and the choice of these connexional priorities will mean that some things are given up or given less time and resources. The Church should cease to do things that do not support *Our Calling*.
- Sticking with a **consistent message and plan** for the next few years, resisting the desire to move on to the next thing. Educating and empowering all members with a clear vision, direction and plan for the church so that all could own it and support it.
- **The Connexional Team serves the Church:** *The overall task of the Connexional Team is to assist the Church in furthering the purposes of the Methodist Church in particular enabling it to better fulfil its calling of responding to God's love in Christ and working out its discipleship in mission and worship. (SO 303(1)).* The Connexional Team should focus on resourcing the Circuits and Districts in their mission plans in response to *Our Calling* and serve the whole Connexion in a few key areas, paying particular attention to the growing regulatory framework that can all too easily distract from the missional life of local church and Circuits.

D. TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE: RESOURCING A CONNEXIONAL LIFE

12. If this framework and direction for the Methodist Church is agreed, as it responds to the challenges of today and reaffirms its commitment to *Our Calling*, then further work needs to be done. Complementary strategic planning in the priority areas will need to take place. Some work has begun, other work will develop at different times. This allows for an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach to all the plans and to ensure they fulfil the values, vision and focus of *Our Calling*. What is essential is that the Methodist Church keeps faith with the call of God and orders itself in such a way that it is constantly alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, praying:

Help me to watch and pray,

*And on thyself rely,
So shall I not my trust betray,
Nor love within me die. (Charles Wesley 1707-88)*

13. In light of the most recent conversations at the CLF, the Council and the SRC there seems to be a desire to focus on the following specific plans:

- **Development of District and Circuit Mission plans** in keeping with SO 400A(1), SO 500(1) and SO 962. These need to be updated and include how the Church will be a good neighbour to people in need and will challenge injustice.
- **Connexional Vocations and Ministry Strategy:** This should lead to growth in the number, variety and breath of vocations allowing for a coherent and connexional approach to developing patterns of ministry for the whole people of God. It will ensure that there are sufficient ministers and lay leadership with the required gifts and qualities who are effectively deployed, and to support these people in their calling, development, ministry and retirement.
- **Review of the decision-making and oversight processes** and ways of working so as to provide simple and cost-effective mechanisms for the oversight of the Methodist Church.
- **Connexional Finance Strategy:** to resource and support new initiatives and plans being developed as the Methodist Church reaffirms its commitment to *Our Calling*. Such a strategy would also ensure careful stewardship of resources.
- **Connexional Property Strategy** for the use of Methodist property in mission and evangelism (Council minute 17.3.11)
- **Enabling the evolution of the Connexional Team** to support best the Church in engaging and responding to *Our Calling*.

14. Between meetings of the Conference *the Methodist Council is authorised to act on behalf of the Conference. (SO 211(1)(a))*

The Council is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps should be taken to make the work of the Church more effective, to give spiritual leadership to the Church and report annually to the Conference, bringing to the notice of the Conference matters to which it believes the Conference ought to give urgent attention. (SO 211(2))

It is suggested that the Methodist Council sets out a plan to enable the Church to reaffirm its commitment to *Our Calling*. The Conference can consider the plan that sets a direction for the Church as it takes actions to revitalise its role in God's mission. All this should enable the whole Connexion to respond "to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission." If accepted by the Conference the Council will set its own objectives and ways of working to measure the efficacy of the connexional plan and strategies agreed. These objectives will be related to the specific areas covered by *Our Calling* and should be measurable, time bound, achievable and owned by all.

15. **The Church fulfils its commitment to *Our Calling* through Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism.** It is in each of these areas that more specific objectives can be set out. While attempting to cover the breadth of the life and activities of the Church it must also help to focus and strategize the use of limited resources of time, money, people and buildings. The difficulty will be to decide at all levels what is not done, given up or done at a very low-key level. A possible five-year plan for the Connexion will help ensure that the whole church gives priority to certain areas to reenergise the Church.

16. *The Methodist Church in Britain is ready for change. We sense in many places signals of hope, a willingness to take risks and creative actions inspired by the gospel. We can re-group our resources and make a difference, especially in partnership with others. We can glimpse a shared vision of God's action in the world and feel again the compulsion of sharing in God's mission. We are beginning to enjoy again the strength and encouragement that came from pulling together across the Connexion and rediscovering our connexionalism. Long-standing problems are no longer being avoided but are tackled with energy and imagination. God's spirit is rebuilding our confidence.*
(Our Calling Conference 2000)
17. The Revd Loraine Mellor, President of the Conference, in her presidential address to the Conference said, "I know I am part, at present, of a declining Church, but I am not part of a declining gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is here to stay, but has the time not come for us to be radical? To take some risks in order that we can grow.... Because, you see.... I do not believe that God is done with us just yet." (Conference 2017) The Revd Canon Gareth Powell, Secretary of the Conference, commenting on the Statistics for Mission report said, "At the heart of this report is a challenge - not with the statistics, but with the very nature of our being. We must take seriously our responsibility for being an evangelistic community of love - a profound giving of attention to another person- which leads people to Christ."
18. The leadership and members of the Methodist Church cannot stand idle and oversee a steady decline. We are called to be agents of transformation, challenged to respond to God's love in Christ. Consequently, we must pay attention to growth and development in the life, mission and service of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Methodist Church is at a Kairos moment; a time ripe for transformation as the Conference, Council, CLF and SRC take responsibility, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for the future of the Methodist Church in Britain. All this should enable the Districts and the Circuits to find purpose and direction for their mission plans and witness. It is a time for action. A reaffirmation of *Our Calling* and an agreed strategic plan will give the Connexion inspiration, hope, a sense of purpose and clarity of direction. While the future is in God's hands the Church can discern what God would like it to focus on today and for the next few years. In all this God will be with the Church always.

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.*

*He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.*

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

APPENDIX ONE

Collated reflections on the state of the work of God from the October 2017 Methodist Council – small group conversations

See also *Notes from feedback session at the Council 17 October 2017*

1. What is needed where you are to better support us in Our Calling?

- Positive support of an effective District Mission Enabler.
- Channel circuit funds to the District to allow for lay worker appointments to assist evangelism.
- Encourage 30 to 40 age range to become involved in Church by targeting parents of youngsters involved in groups connected to churches eg uniformed organisations.
- Positively encourage retired people in the locality to become involved in weekday activities which may lead to Sunday attendance.
- Share good practice across churches / Circuits / Districts.
- Take an unblinkered walk around church buildings to identify what is unwelcoming about them.
- Churches with growing congregations often are churches which expect commitment from members of time / talents / monetary support and attendance of home / group meetings.
- More modern furniture in our worship areas.
- Encourage risk-taking (inc. exit strategies. Is a chapel with a congregation of 3 really presence?)
- Ability to take decisions and follow them through.
- Confidence is low and energy low as fatigue is overwhelming.
- Tendency to feel threatened by need to copy what other 'successful' churches are doing, rather than focusing on what they can do.
- Leaders needed, whether lay or ordained.
- Don't defer to the ordained – recognise all have a vocation.
- Encourage people to talk about God to each other before they will talk outside. Help people to see that their testimony is valuable and sharing it is natural (doesn't have to be damascene conversation). It takes practice sometimes.
- Practical ideas needed that people can engage with and try.
- Early Methodists very keen on holding each other accountable in pairs etc.
- Finding ways of helping people to deepen their spirituality.
- Evangelism – good examples how [to] be done from around Connexion. Technique. Equipment.
- Service bit, taking away guilt – on journey.
- Define evangelism – things we do, rather than we say.
- Sharing love of Christ. Inviting to church.
- Not extrovert – quietly, sharing with each other.
- Define word – finding right language. Ordinary doesn't need big things. Do it naturally.
- *Move it from last priority to top.*
- "Nudge [...]" – people are capable – giving a shove in right direction.
- Quality of service improved.
- Bible studies.
- Re-introduce Our Calling – this type of discussion in churches.
- Resources on ground – committed. Release people to...
- Produce material to show small groups.
- Re-focus.
- Church own "OUR CALLING" – move into conversations Church of God.
- Increasingly bothered: Methodists don't want to lead or be led. Leadership is a dirty word. Leadership lacking – really need improved quality of worship on Sunday am. No-one disagrees but no-one will do anything about it. One example: LPs: people come once and don't return. No-one will take the hard decisions about feeding people – several LPs don't.

- Church Councils: people stuff done elsewhere: all about property etc. Challenge re governance and mission (Trustees vs leaders). Need to do some of this shake up. Trust – let them get on with it but then not happy.
- Don't have wisdom structures – how do we find ways of having door stewards plus where discernment and wisdom lie. Revs aren't there long enough for trust to grow enough (needs 10 years?).
- Governance is hindering mission. In a large Circuit, a group could look after it to release the tired ones for mission. Each group has to trust the other and its motivation. Could put a numerical limit, eg 50 members, before Trustees.
- Need to be reminded of / have a re-affirmation of Our Calling (OC).
- One person's experience: in former District, everything was structured around OC; then moved District and found no-one seemed to know about it...
- OC may have become diluted by other initiatives.
- Many either won't remember it, weren't there before, etc.
- Only time it gets mentioned is "when people apply for a district grant"! Having said that, it SHOULD be a key criterion.
- Would be good to have a raft of new resources
 - eg Bible studies
 - draw together stories from The Buzz or other comms
 - challenge Circuits to say what they have done / are doing under the headings of OC
 - rework the posters
- Do we need to change the words? Some say no, some say yes...
 - Evangelism is a difficult word – perhaps use "sharing our faith" as an alternative
 - "Knowing, growing and going" as an alternative gloss on it. Three points are easier to remember than four!
 - But it took for ever to agree the words before. Don't want to do that again.
- Need to get it into our DNA. Some places DO still use OC as a structure for Church Councils etc.
- There is very little good specifically METHODIST material for house-groups. Great opportunity to do this with OC (without changing the words), link it to bible study and show the connections to Jesus' way.
- Many people feel unconfident discussing our faith. This kind of small group work will give them the words.
- Empower "ordinary people" to lead small groups. Too much deferring to experts (in society generally and in church)... People are scared to engage when they feel others know more. It's one of the callings to help people learn and care for them.
- Lay leadership must be encouraged, we don't have enough presbyters to go round. No need for heavyweight theology, with a booklet and other materials a group can be led by many people.
- Communication has changed since OC was first conceived – use Twitter, blogs, etc as well as paper resources. Use the connexion mag – pick up the themes on a recurring basis. Rather than the annual cycle of presidential "themes", you could have EIGHT years of OC – two years for each topic so there's some consistency and reinforcement.
- Local Churches may have to go right back to the basics. "Mission statements" that are generalisations without any real specifics or targets. Will take a lot of work!
- Have to start where people are – even sharing our faith with each other in worship (ie among friends) is hard for many. But OC could be a good starting point.
- Fine for big churches – but what can we do for the tiny ones? Could we have a "preaching series" to be pushed out to local preachers etc, with suggested readings etc around the four themes of OC. EVERYONE to do this for say 12 weeks (4 topics * 3 weeks each). Really push it – be bold, tell people it's vital!
- REINFORCEMENT and CONSISTENCY are important. Good educational practice.

2. What would support your District in fulfilling its mission plan?

- Continue to add to and update the plan, share it with Circuits and churches, regularly refer to it and actively work to achieve it.
- Encourage congregations to view the District, and their Circuit, positively.
- If Circuits need to combine do it in a time of strength not when in crisis.
- Having a plan to start with! Some Districts have priorities or enablers, but not a plan.
- Tools to help people think about doing things differently (Re-imagine church mentioned favourably).
- Training for lay people to develop confidence (Lay Gospel Leaders training planned in Scotland).
- Apologetics material would be welcomed.
- Ways of helping people to speak of their faith – often engaged in communities but are embarrassed to make it clear that they are motivated by their faith.
- Emphasis on church planting.
- Use people resources effectively. Diaconal and presbyteral appointments need to be what they say they are.
- A consistent offer is needed within a church so people know what to expect.
- ‘The plan’ is killing Methodism – it is a rota; not a PLAN.
- Every district have one?
- Release people to focus on right questions.
- Lived out in life of Districts.
- Connexion ‘template’ – then this is how [to] achieve it.
- Temptation to have too many things on plan.
- Enable circuits to...
Timeline.
- What do we stop doing, so [we] can resource people to do things?
- Circuit / District – giving up something to enable another church.
- Quality of thinking – down to Local Church.
- DPC – get involved and take responsibility to take it to each church.
- Each church own, how implement it – drawn into services.
- Build on ‘Our Calling.’
- ‘Called to Love and Praise’ – in hard copy.
- How to keep church focused.
- Use information – and resourcing local churches.
- Role of DLMP – need to service Our Calling.
- Q2 – tricky over a large diverse area. Four signs of a living church – each church needs to demonstrate and audit itself around a few priorities – simple – then Circuit can balance resources. Answer simple questions regularly eg Our Calling questions. Growing or End of Life Plan? Grow at any age, eg lay work to Third Age. Each church to determine how it carries out its mission.
- Safeguarding leadership not always provided in church. Stuff that’s normal in organisations is not accepted by church members.
- Restructure district structure to fit Our Calling.
- Intention and commitment – SMART objectives help avoid tick-box mentality. This is discernment not form-filling. Minister is enabling role. DMLN person has prepared s.t. to guide through meeting (NW & Mann).
- Do we know what our plan is? Some do, some don’t...
- First thing then is to make sure people even know it exists.
- Revisit plans to make sure that they follow OC – structure them around the same topics. Not all Districts feel this would work. Perhaps what is needed is “making the connections” more obvious, rather than necessarily fitting everything to the same four headings.
- Set grant criteria in line with our priorities among the Callings – eg might we want to focus grants on worship for the next 2-3 years?

- Problem of too much “other stuff” clogging up agendas and inboxes. Best support would be relieving some of that burden. Ministers are having to deal with buying and selling manses, selling redundant churches, etc! In a single minister Circuit, it’s a huge load.
- Will need to be prepared to PAY more people to do stuff like property and treasurer work. Have to release funds for this.
- Many things are more document-heavy than ever before, eg employment law, compliance, finance... Get this off the back of ministers!
- “We’re not poor” – but how do we get money to the right place?
- Stationing is a part of this. Finding the right Superintendents with the right skills for a particular role is not easy. Opportunities are being missed because we don’t have the right people in the right places.
- GET RID of single-station Circuits! It puts people in situations with no support and no monitoring. But how to get rid? Merging circuits into much larger units may be inevitable, but geographical distances become unmanageable in rural areas. And that in itself is a recipe for decline.
- Church won’t grow without FOCUS on places, communities, etc. Spreading ministers too thin doesn’t work.
- Can we make more of the ministry of local preachers? One answer – “we haven’t got any...” Another – “they’re in their eighties and keep dragging me back.”
- Don’t “dot” local preachers around the plan, concentrate them more in specific places, encourage lay ministry to develop in those places. In recent past, local preachers were more involved in the work of the Circuit and its leadership, now they have just become a way of filling gaps in the plan. What made the change? Restructuring in the 1970s when instead of leaders’ meetings we started having Church Councils and (some) local preachers got frozen out. Something similar happened with stewards. In the past, they were more involved in spiritual life – still in CPD but not happening.
- Local preachers have the same problem of over-load – many have to do “other things” too, eg being organist on other Sundays!
- The role of worship leaders was to develop worship in the local context. Not just taking occasional Sundays.
- Whatever we do, there will be grumbles!

3. How does the Council see its role in responding to the situation?

- Need to have clearer structure of accountability from Conference to Council to employees.
- Need to prioritise its time and effort into a small number of issues and then give adequate time to them to be successful.
- Find a structure to prioritise “good choices” from a number of “good choices.”
- Pray more at Council.
- Free up resources.
- Find ways to encourage / force the sharing of resources across the Connexion.
- CLF – Council to set the tone – to say what numbers and lead on it.
- ? scope stats, but how do we make it positive, build confidence.
- Do something about it, but people are tired, feel guilty, inadequate – need to be positive.
- How record stats – those who come regularly but not members.
- Close churches – not worshipping communities – ‘this is what we are going to do’ – happen locally.
- Help with resources.
- Not taken membership seriously – ? membership service each year.
- ‘Membership’ – less disciples than members.
- Setting tone – positive.
- Social media / use of local media.
- Good news stories – connexion.
- Start in worship – local resources.
- Local people only relate to people in church.

- Who are our friends, about love of Christ – share.
- Commit to consider its role, change of climate, positive message, originate new ideas.
- Why do we need Council? Think strategic.
- 2nd order – 4 committee live in church.
- Fixed agenda, stuff talking about, v. tight agenda.
- Doug’s words about two-page strategy AB’s Council. We’re set up differently and makes the leadership question hard.
- People don’t expect a culture of leadership in church that is present in other organisations – they don’t offer and they’re infantilised. People are volunteers.
- Council papers linking to Our Calling would help – each paper to show theological link – model this at Council and share outwards and put it at the core. Discernment: believe Methodist Council is genuinely seeking the will of God. Must listen carefully, read the papers, avoid distractions. Churches struggle to discern the will of God. Council needs to become more transparent because we’re connexional. Special niche in being connexional – how do we use this as a strength. Being itinerant, we have to find where the leadership lies each time – don’t have a license to lead.
- Refresh Our Calling for today – interfaith, global issues. Focus in a few Wesleyan questions and review annually. We used to do this and we’ve lost it, but it didn’t work! Although could make anything fit but need review questions and leadership.
- “There are times when I’d love to throw out the book of papers” – should we “have the guts to say STOP” and just wrestle with the real stuff that counts.
- Stop initiative-overload. Especially too many that are supposed to trickle down to all places.
- Role of Council is to provide the resources described above.
- We need to make PRIORITIES for the Connexional Team to respond to. If the Team has to drop some other work, we need to defend the decisions that have been taken.
- Council have a role of advocacy – spread the word. Once the resources are available, up to us to help communicate them.
- Good news that *the connexion* is being themed on Our Calling – can we theme the Covenant Service around the same too, as both are coming at about the same time.

4. The Statistics for Mission report shows the changing face of Methodism – how should our decision-making processes adapt to reflect this?

- All Council motions should be taken *en bloc* and only have discussions if issues have been raised prior to the session, thus leaving more time for constructive debate and discussion groups.
- Meetings (church, circuit and Council) often discuss the detail and not the principles.
- Have a bi-annual Conference, therefore allowing more time for agreed motions to be acted on, to free up more time for connexion [*Connexional Team?*] employees, and to save money.
- Increasingly people attend things that happen not on a Sunday – need to move resources in that direction.
- Address the NoM situation at the Conference.
- The Conference invites campaigners rather than participation and relevance to the Church.
- Council agenda – no reflexability.
- While to switch into Council mode.
- Understand what’s going on.
- Not efficient in way we use our time.
- Challenge – finding out more.
- Say time to spend money on – where is the focus.
- What do we stop doing.
- Circuits to push back to Conference to say not doing that work.
- At no point “Council being Council.”
Imperfect system – nobody controlling.
- Stats – ‘not a big church’ – behave like small organisation not a big one.

- Contact in schools – contact after primary school.
- No trust in committees – keep discussing the same thing. (PDC) – give them the power.
- Reports – no actions.
- Bucking trend – ethnic groups.
- Numbers are measurable, not an aim. Even if [we] do exciting things, not making more disciples is [a] problem: that’s our mission.
- Q4 – too few people in skills in each church; better in Circuit and District.
- Need to sort out how we exercise authority. Leadership doesn’t have to be in authority. Local government: church rubbish at it. (He’d be disciplinary)
- If church can’t demonstrate good basics, better than an average organ, we have a problem.
- Council to set priorities – as above.
- Difficult balance between wanting to be “light on our feet” and yet stop things going all over the place.
- Stats for Mission – one District thinks we’re asking the wrong questions. Not showing up the activity going on in the church day by day, week by week.
- Rather than counting heads, should we ask people how they are responding to Our Calling?
- At LOCAL level, Methodism is changing. Should local decision-making evolve too? Do we need so many Church Councils? Have ONE circuit/church meeting rather than four or six individual Church Councils?
- Is changing our decision-making processes the priority? Or is this second- or third-order stuff? Our decline has happened over a lengthy period, do we need to be panicked into trying to respond quickly when that isn’t necessarily the need?
- Big issue locally is running out of people to do the jobs. People having to wear multiple hats. Not the decision-making process itself, more looking at the jobs that we actually NEED to do, rather than the ones we’ve always had. What jobs do we need to deliver good worship and to evangelise? Not the same old committees.
- Give people a voice in the way their church is run. Youth leaders, playschool, etc can all contribute – a sort of “family committee”. ‘Membership’ isn’t so important now.
- What does membership mean? Is it just like a family that we’re born into? Or is there a real sense of recommitment each year?
- So-called members who may even be on councils etc but who don’t come on a Sunday morning! For some, “giving your life to Jesus” is tantamount to membership. For others, that doesn’t come into it. But it MUST be connected to discipling. Turning up is not enough.
- Have an annual “opt in” linked to the Covenant Service. Become stricter about allowing people a membership ticket...? The annual count is something of a fiction! Can be distorted by anniversary services etc... If we want to do it properly, we need to count every week.

Uncategorised notes:

We need a mechanism by which presbyters and deacons can be freed to do “ministry” rather than becoming compliance officers. This might need resource given to Districts and Circuits to enable them to employ “managers” eg a circuit manager – people who can deal with the buildings / safeguarding / line management / finance / insurance / basically the small business aspects of the task of circuit ministers that keep them away from the real mission and ministry.

Talk about training needs, and how to enable people to tell their story, getting them to practise in a safe place (ie church) before they feel able to share their stories in a wider context. We talked about changing a culture to enable confidence.

The group spoke about lay pastors and lay ministers and the need to both resource and train them and work on identifying their calling. In particular the notion of itinerancy was discussed, ordaining those who had no call to itinerancy. It feels like at present those who are not called to itinerancy are deemed not called to ordination is that right?

We talked about harnessing the energy of the 1,000 plus young people at 3Generate and how we make sure we don't lose them, investment in new media the creation of a YouTube channel where people could watch vlogs that show them how to share their faith – tips and funny stories that encourage people. A real person sharing their experience of evangelism, so people feel enabled.

We talked about the “clunky” governance and the draining nature of that. We talked about how you create a critical mass of people in a congregation ready to do something – opportunities for people to share tips on doing this.

What is the Council's role? Leadership, the group noted that the leaders need to step up and take action, it was noted that those who are elected to Council are, by nature, the “connexionally minded” type – this is not true of most people in our churches. Maybe the Council could tell the Conference to be more focused on the things that matter – could the Council be more directive?

There was discussion of holding “business Conferences” one year – that did all the things Conference needs to do and then “mission Conferences” the next with space for blue sky thinking vision etc. Some realised that this might be difficult to achieve given the number of reports etc already in process that need to come to Conference in the years ahead – it might be seen to be slowing things down – still there was a feeling that space in the Conference Agenda for a more visionary and uplifting discussion and plan making for future ways of being church would be of value – could the “business” be pushed into a small time space in the overall Conference?

The group spoke of the value in story and narrative and the value of small groups. The development of a suite of resources for small groups was mentioned. The group affirmed the reaffirmation of Our Calling, asked for more materials/posters etc maybe a bible study set of notes?

...

How we hold each other to account (eg LP example) eg CC decision and no change – we're not very good at that and it's important. What does that say about conferring and connexionalism?

It's unkind to close chapels / sort LPs and pastoral kindness stops us acting. Power is always somewhere else – how can we lead? It's by consensus and with trust.

Fellowship: quite good at leadership but poor at fellowship. Need to get that right as a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

We've lost the joy of serving each other – relationships rather than process. Trust and loyalty. We think more about ourselves rather than Our Calling. We're smaller in reach and can become more efficient.