PART C:

BACKGROUND READING

Team Focus: Project 1

Convene a consultation to draw out a wide range of imaginative suggestions, appropriate to a diverse Church, of what could be entailed by *'evangelism and speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved.'*

And then discern what the Team can best contribute.

Section 1: Background and remit of the project

A priority for the Methodist Church

Arising initially from one of the four major strands of *Our Calling, t*his project relates to one of the key consequential priorities for the Methodist Church adopted by Conference (2004), after a consultative process across the whole Church:

'In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

> *To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.*

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following: …

> *Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved …'*

Part of the remit of this project is to help the Church develop an understanding of what is meant by evangelism and how it links to speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved, and to promote a wider ownership of the work of evangelism and speaking of God and faith in the whole Church.

A long-term planned strategy for re-building confidence in God, in our faith in God and in our ability to share our faith in God appropriately is the single most important contribution that is needed for the *Priorities of the Methodist Church* to become a reality.

The core project group

Members of the core group:
- Peter Sulston (Coordinating Secretary for Unity in Mission)
- Keith Davies (Chair of Manchester and Stockport District)
- Peter Hancock (Superintendent minister of Huddersfield Pennine circuit, member of the Evangelism Strategy Group)
- Janet Morley (Secretary for Adult Learning, convenor of the Discipleship and Church Membership Task Group)
- Viv Morrissey (Training and Development Officer in the Yorkshire districts, member of the Evangelism Strategy Group)

The group was assisted by John Nelson and Ken Kingston of the Policy Support and Research Unit. Jonathan Kerry (Coordinating Secretary for Church Life) attended some meetings and received the papers of the group.

Scope of the objectives and recommendations of this project

The terms of reference of the project suggested the following outputs:
- A wider ownership of the diverse understandings in the Church of the terms used;
- A shared understanding of what is expected of Team, Circuits, Districts and individuals;
- An implementation plan for the Team (in partnership with other stakeholders);
- A statement of the priority of this work in terms of budget and other resources;
- A longer term vision: where do we hope to be by, say, 2010 or 2015.

Process of consultation

- Written contributions were solicited from a wide group of Methodist stakeholders who met for a day consultation on 4 July 2005. Many of the quotations in this document come from this day meeting.
- Staff employed by the Connexional Team, along with District Evangelism Enablers were invited to respond to a questionnaire, which asked about work currently in hand or planned, which relates to the priority. (The responses to the questionnaire are available on request.)
- The core group met five times, including a residential.
- Individual conversations were held with the Secretary for Evangelism and Church Planting, the Principal of Cliff College, the Chair of the Evangelism Strategy Group, the Discipleship and Church Membership Task Group, Rob Frost, the Secretary of Interface and members of the Connexional Team responsible for Children's Work, Youth Work and Racial Justice.
- An interim draft of the report, with rationale and objectives, was circulated widely for consultation and comment, including by those invited to the 4 July meeting and to those who contributed to the survey. The draft was discussed with the Evangelism Strategy Group and with ecumenical contacts.

Existing work relating to this priority, in the Connexional Team and the districts

The Connexional Team currently employs or has appointed to it the following staff with an explicit brief for evangelism and speaking of God and faith:
- Evangelism and Church Planting Officer
- Evangelism Enablers Coordinator (p/t)
- Evangelism Resources and Training Officer (p/t)
- Secretary of Interface (p/t)
- Member of ecumenical Fresh Expressions Team
- Principal, Cliff College (ex-officio of the Connexional Team)

Also employed by the Connexion, 19 Training and Development Officers work closely with District Evangelism Enabler/District Mission Enabler colleagues. The TDO job description is written so that their skills and functions are generic (consultancy, facilitation, brokering between training need and training resource).

This means that actual changing emphases in priorities within districts can swiftly be incorporated into their working objectives. Where districts are prioritising evangelism and developing confidence in speaking of faith and where circuits are seeking assistance in reviewing their mission, this is reflected in the work plans of both TDOs and DEEs/DMEs concerned.

Employed by the districts, there are currently 22 District Evangelism Enablers/Mission Enablers. These appointments operate under a variety of terms, conditions and job descriptions, there is still considerable uncertainty about best practice with these appointments. They are offered support and coordination by a member of the Connexional Team. Increasingly now there are some Circuit Evangelism Enablers coming on stream.

However, a range of other staff consider this priority to be one of the key drivers of their own work.

Section 2: What is…?

'Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?'
                              John Bell

This popular contemporary hymn has a deceptive simplicity, but this single verse succinctly summarises what we are called to as Christian disciples. It is straightforward, but enormous in its scope. It will cost us everything, but it comes to us as a love-song. It reminds us:
- We are personally called to be a follower of Jesus
- We have to give up being in control and let the Spirit guide us
- This will completely transform us
- Social action (*let my love be shown)* evangelism *(let my name be known)* and personal holiness *(let my life be grown)* are all to be combined in a compassionate, articulate and holy life of discipleship rooted in Christ.

Methodists in recent years have felt much more comfortable with engaging in social action than in evangelism, or in speaking of God and faith and of the life of committed discipleship.
But there is a new wave of interest in how we can tell the story, as well as live the Christian life together. The consultation process which gave rise to this report sought to explore questions such as:
- What does this priority mean throughout the Church and beyond the Church?
- What things are currently being done to 'develop confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all concerned'?
- What in our present context gives pointers to the future?

- What obstacles to more work or greater confidence do we need to remove?
- What, specifically, would engage the prayers and imagination of the Methodist people for 'evangelism and speaking of God in ways that make sense to all involved'?

Evangelism

'The Church exists to…make more followers of Jesus Christ.' (*Our Calling*)

'The purpose of evangelism is to initiate people into the kingdom of God.' (William Abraham)

'To evangelise is to share with others the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ … An authentically Christian evangelism reflects the nature of God. It will be vulnerable, patient, loving.' (*Called to Love and Praise*, 3.2.2)

'The Church needs to be re-shaped as a community of seekers.' (David Deeks)

'The Methodist doctrine of prevenient grace reminds us that God is at work in all sorts of ways … One of the hardest tasks of the evangelist is continually searching for signs of the Holy Spirit at work in the strangest places and most unexpected people and joining in appropriately.' (Graham Horsley)

Our lifelong Christian journey is one of 'faith seeking understanding.' This means that, whatever stage of that pilgrimage we are on, we are all continually seekers, people who wait upon God. We have experience of God, faith that we can articulate – the joy of finding God, knowing Christ, and being graciously invited into a relationship which grows ever deeper as we journey in faith. We also have struggles, questions and doubts – these too are part of the journey of faith, in which God can be found. The Holy Spirit is at work in us in all sorts of ways, and is not finished with us yet. We are on this journey because we have been loved, listened to, respected, and addressed in language that makes sense to us. We have found in the Christian communities that have touched us a safe place to become who we truly are in the sight of God. We aspire to be a community who can speak of faith while we are still seekers, and who go on seeking even as we speak about our faith.

There should not be rigid boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in the evangelistic enterprise, but a real engagement with each other's culture and understanding. Graham Horsley describes a helpful model of evangelism, developed by Andrew Jones from the sending out of the seventy-two in Luke chapter 10:

- Go (v. 3) – *go to people where they are; don't expect them to come to you;*
- Enter (v. 5) – *enter the homes and lives of those who are receptive;*
- Stay (v. 7) – *listen for a long time to understand, before speaking;*
- Eat and drink (v. 7) – *receive from their culture, do not impose your own;*
- Heal (v. 9) – *pray for them with compassion, and faith in the power of God;*
- Tell (v. 9) – *the last part of the progression, not the first. And Jesus' way of telling is usually more provocative than proclamatory.*

Those in Methodism who have been most engaged in evangelistic endeavours have reflected on their practice and have largely moved on from simplistic, 'pre-critical' forms of evangelism. There has been critical reflection on religious experience, the

nature of conversion, the ethics of seeking to change someone's mind in a pluralistic culture, and so on. But Martyn Atkins pleads for what he calls 'a second naivety' – a 'post-critical' recovery of certain aspects of evangelism, which we may be in danger of losing:

- Missionary congregations, or fresh expressions of church still require the ministry of evangelism.
- The stress on evangelism as a process does not do away with the need for points of 'crisis' and decision-making.
- Contemporary 'churchless' spirituality require a rediscovery of the sense of the mystery of God's dealings with us.
- The need for community requires means by which people are clearly invited to belong and appropriate shared values.

Confidence

'I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.' (Romans 1:16)

'The nature of "average" Methodism is the most profound source of a lack of confidence in the gospel. Confidence begins with ownership and a belief in the veracity and authenticity of Christianity in our churches.' (Martyn Atkins)

'We need to reclaim a mood of confidence in the purpose of the Church within the mission of God … we must find ways in which the challenges of our age and culture(s) can be seen as opportunities as well as threats.' *(Jonathan Kerry)*

'Many people in different ways already talk of God with confidence, and don't want to be sold a new package … Others don't really appreciate the difference between "discussing" concepts, and making themselves vulnerable by talking of their wrestling with faith. Others compart-mentalise religion and the rest of life and don't want to muddy the waters. Many are afraid of making themselves vulnerable, and there is a universal impetus to find ways round the subject, rather than into it.' (Jenny Ellis)

Are we seeing confidence 'in the gospel' or 'in evangelism' or 'in the purpose of the Church in the mission of God' as primary? Do not all of these point to the more profound question of our confidence in God? This is primary.

What has attacked our confidence in God? Ann Morisy has pointed out that we live in a very anxious culture, in uncertain and unpredictable times. The hedonism and voyeurism that we see are partly coping mechanisms in an anxious culture, and the Church is affected by this. For a variety of reasons many churchgoers may be low in self-esteem and fearful of taking risks. Yet we trace our heritage from John Wesley, who was so affected by the fearless witness of the Moravian Christians in a storm at sea, who said to him 'We are not afraid to die, and our children are not afraid to die.'

Mike Seaton affirms that, among Christian young people, there is a confidence in God and the gospel, but not in the Church as it is now, where the model of leadership may be experienced as disempowering, and some of the language of worship likely to lower young people's confidence in their own authentic voice.

Paradoxically, true confidence is perhaps most evident in those who are 'willing to make themselves vulnerable by talking of wrestling with their faith.' The confident Christian is not one who can be relied on to assert certainties, but one who is willing to wait upon God even in times of uncertainty, and to engage in the kind of sharing of personal stories and questions that exposes the nature of the authentic journey they are on. If a Christian is imbued with the life of Christ, their communications will be shot through with the character and grace of the Lord, and they will not come over as arrogant.

Making sense

'We are in a different place in this culture – there is a strong spiritual awareness that doesn't use the language I use. It is fascinating but difficult to engage with … we need to learn new languages.'   (Peter Whittaker)

'The Church needs to hear from children what the kingdom of God should be like.'
                                                                                                                (Susan McIvor)

The phrase 'making sense' is specifically linked to 'finding ways of speaking of God and faith' that are 'appropriate to a diverse Church' and recognises the diversity of the audiences who may hear: what is said must 'make sense to all concerned'. We need to ask what weight we give to that last phrase: does it mean all sorts and conditions of people or is it restricted to those who have a concern, and therefore presumably will listen or share in the conversation?

Yet in order for a conversation to be possible, we in the Church have to become aware of how most of the religious language we find meaningful can be experienced as impenetrable to those who have never been bathed in it. We need to find ways of articulating our faith in the languages of the various contexts and cultures we participate in beyond the Church. We have much to learn from work with children and young people here. Children are a gift to the Church – they do not let you get away often with opaque language from a world they do not inhabit. Wherever possible, we should include children and their readiness to be spiritually open.

'Making sense' is a multi-layered phrase. It should probably include the need to put the emphasis in some of our speaking on being reasonable. Life does not 'make sense' in a simple way. It connects with the traditional understanding of apologetics and the importance of an adequate theodicy. We have to be prepared to address the intellectual challenges that will be asked (while recognising that the gospel, when prophetic and countercultural, can seem 'foolish' in the eyes of the world – 1 Corinthians 1). It is important in this media dominated age that we should have compelling and respectable speakers who can represent Christian faith in the public domain in ways that don't make you wince - people who manage to be attractive, memorable communicators without 'dumbing down' the message, and can explain the gospel in ways that make sense and put the Christian perspective into current events.

John Wesley appealed to those of 'reason and religion'. Our speaking must connect to the sense of spirituality that people have. It must be relevant and resonate with their experience, in its variety, its secularity, and, for many, its darkness and irrationality. We must speak to the heart as well as to the head and engage the

emotional, intuitive, aesthetic faculties as well as the rational. (For some art, music, drama, film and literature do this.)

Most people today define their spirituality primarily by experience. If we wish to 'make sense' to the world outside the Church, experience must come before explanation. This is not to minimise the importance of explanation, rather to set it in a proper context. If we seek to explain what others are not experiencing, they will not listen. Of course, what people experience and how it 'makes sense' to them is mediated by the surrounding culture, and this is no longer explicitly permeated with Christian resonances or markers.

So our speaking must appeal not only to 'sense' but to 'sensibility'. It must 'add up', enabling people to do the reckoning: yes, I will take a calculated risk (cf: Paul in Romans 8:18: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory about to be revealed to us.'). Not all communication is about speaking or presenting reasoned intellectual arguments. We need to be willing to be alongside people in their pain and suffering, and to be honest about what our own struggles are. Making sense includes being 'realistic' as well as 'truthful'. Part of that is constantly doing 'reality checks' - what is 'gospel', how does faith become 'real' in this or that immediate context, be it personal, communal, national or global?

The recognition of 'diversity' does mean that we should resist the kind of synthesising approach that tries to take all the diverse ingredients of our histories and experiences and weave or blend or stir them into some glorious mix. For most individuals, life is composed of fragments, bits and pieces: we work across cultures, we inhabit different worlds, we live our lives within different communities of practice (ie: different groups of people in and through whom we become whom we are and in relation to which we discover and make meaning), we do not always feel internally self-consistent. Yet we believe that integration is available to those who choose to let an overarching Christian story contain and interpret their own story.

Section 3: The context in society

Social trends and the changing position of the church urge us to prioritise the goal of evangelism. Our twenty-first century context has many opportunities and new challenges. The way we live now requires very different approaches to the task of sharing the gospel.

A primary missionary context

'We have reached what I can only call a "tipping moment" … We are no longer "recalling" people to faith, but challenging engagement with latent spirituality giving it form and content based on Jesus.'   (Peter Whittaker)

It is problematic to describe twenty-first century Britain as a Christian country. Although over 70% of the population (National Census 2001) identify themselves with Christianity, this does not necessarily reflect personal practice or belief. We can no longer assume any residual knowledge of the Bible, the basics of the Christian

faith, or familiarity with Christian practice among the population at large. The major Christian festivals have become secularised and for many their meaning has been lost, even though our calendar is still structured around them. For many years the most productive area in evangelism has been with the 'dechurched', calling people back to a faith with which they have lost contact (but this is now a fast declining group). Children, on the whole, no longer receive Christian formation within their families. Assumptions, approach and language of evangelism must change and the challenge to the church is to embrace risk in moving into new forms of cultural engagement.

Spirituality fascinates people today, but institutional Christianity doesn't. 'Spiritual Intelligence' is being promoted in the business world as an addition to the seven types of intelligence already identified, and big businesses are exploring ways of meeting the 'spiritual' needs of their staff. Many people today do not seek answers in integrated systems of belief; they are attracted to a spirituality that involves all or many of their senses, as exemplified by various New Age expressions.

However, there are also Christian believers with a good grounding in the Bible, who have been formed and raised in other countries, who have migrated to Great Britain. Through their presence in English speaking congregations, and through congregations worshipping in other mother tongues, they bring an alternative dimension. However, the challenge and potential influence they bring has often been ignored or resisted, because of the perception that Asian and Black Christians have no significant leadership to offer, or that western views and approaches to worship, discipleship and evangelism are the only ones worth considering.

A multi faith and multi cultural society

'The relationship between the Christian faith and the many, richly-varied cultures of the world calls for careful work and sensitive cooperation.'   (Called to Love and Praise, 3.2.8)

'We need to hear the voices of all and to include their perceptions and experiences as we model new ways of being Church and society.'   (Naboth Muchopa)

Society is enriched by diversity and some Christians find the challenge to their beliefs a stimulus to deeper exploration. However, when religion, misconstrued in the public mind as fundamentalism, is perceived as a source of division and conflict in society, this may have the effect on some Christians of dimming confidence in Christian faith. There is growing unease about fundamentalism across the faiths. Christians rightly engage in promoting dialogue, understanding and harmony between people of different faiths but need help to find a comfortable model of sharing their faith in this context. However, our religiously plural society can be a resource as well as a problem. We can grow in faith and we can work with people of other faiths to speak meaningfully of God in the public domain.

In our plural society, there are voices urging secularisation. In the world of education, the faith schools debate typifies the tensions between those who see valuing diversity as the way forward and those who see secularisation as the only answer. It is not only a question of how Christianity is taught in schools, but how the local churches engage in partnerships with schools. There are also new opportunities to work with children in partnership with local authorities, eg in

extended schools. These require a willingness to work in an open way , being alongside children in their lives, activities, exploration of the world, building community and encouraging the development of maturity and character.

The Church finds itself with a new apologetic challenge within these tensions and a call to demonstrate the gospel of love in practical action. It finds itself called into partnership with other faiths for the sake of the poor, and called to hold in balance the new learning and insights of reflective practice with the faith sharing imperative.

The network society

'An increasingly mobile society means that the place where people live is decreasingly of importance to them – the important part of their lives, and important friendships and experiences, are elsewhere.' (*Mission-Shaped Church* (2004))

This impacts on the appeal of the local church. People need community but find it in special interest groups, or on the internet. However, there is also a trend away from the commitment of joining any sort of group as members . People prefer shared activity and interconnected-ness without responsibility or permanence. Affiliation is transient. This presents a challenge to the Christian faith which ultimately requires lifelong commitment and the embracing of a new community. 'Speaking of God and faith' needs to happen in the places where people are, using their networks. Evangelism needs to be an enterprise owned by the whole Christian family as they interact with, and within, these networks. The Church needs to nurture and equip all Christ's people in these interactions.

How is the practice and understanding of evangelism influenced by post-modernism?

'Countless people other than Christians have a deep concern for spiritual matters. Some, professing no religion, hunger for a different life-style. Aware of an emptiness which material possessions cannot satisfy, they protest against the aimlessness of much of modern life, and the increasing devastation of the planet.' *(Called to Love and Praise, 3.2.9)*

'What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.' *(Acts 17.23)*
In a society which emphasises consumption as a major element of our human identity, we now face the reality of mass customisation. The individual is king. The famous pick and mix metaphor sums it up. We require products - cars, holidays, chocolates, to be tailor made. Some have envisaged the church of the future as a multiplex cinema presenting various worship options to suit different tastes. Beliefs and ideologies also offer a wide spectrum of choice. People regard their spiritual needs in the same light, rejecting 'packages' or systems of belief but cherry-picking aspects that appeal to them from diverse sources. Spiritual longing and the search for meaning or fulfilment are as acute as ever, but the 'market place' presents an ever wider range of options. Truth is perceived to be personal rather than corporate, and all encompassing narratives of faith have lost their appeal. However, for some of the younger generations, values are shared across peer groups.

In such a context, Christians need to address what we believe to be at the heart of the Gospel, and what is 'non-negotiable' within Christian belief. On the one hand there must be a genuine respect for, and knowledge of the strongly felt spiritual impulses within our culture. Any 'speaking of God' has to be in terms that people understand and are attracted by. St Paul, preaching at Athens, commended the Athenians for their interest in religion, and took as his starting point their altar to the 'unknown god'. Anything that does not seem to be part of the culture, or seems simply dated, will not come within people's radar of possible choices. A credible contemporary 'branding' of what the Church has to say is essential.

On the other hand, belief in God's saving work in Christ, and commitment to the path of being a disciple of Jesus are not just one choice among many – they will ask of us 'not less than everything'. This is a matter of commitment and not just 'sampling'. But to choose to follow Jesus, and to take on all that this means, is not often a 'once for all' decision. Most of us struggle throughout our lives to grasp how the Gospel calls us to be transformed in its service.

In this context the way of evangelism is enabling and empowering. It is about being alongside the individual learner. The skills of facilitation are key to encouraging exploration that leads to faith and to continuing to grow and mature as Christians. We need to offer opportunities openly to explore different theological and doctrinal options, and different experiences of discipleship (including mission and evangelism), so that people can make informed choices. This is ongoing work, as people are on a journey and may change their views along the way.

Demography, family patterns and personal relationships

Over 10% of the adult population is divorced or separated. 22% of children live in single parent families, and more than 10% of the remainder live in stepfamilies. For many children, weekends, including Sundays, are taken up keeping contact with the non-custodial side of the family. There is a steep rise in the number of single people, due to later marriage trends and alternative relationship patterns. However young single adults are on the whole conspicuously absent from our Church life profile. Demographically, British society is an ageing population – a trend which is vastly over-represented in Methodist Church life. These factors present new opportunities and challenges. They call us to re-examine our methods of reaching the younger generation. School assembly work and religious education are points of contact with children and young people. Pioneers (and followers) are needed with particular skills of relating to today's fast moving, high tech, instant communications culture. However, front edge evangelism is never the whole story. By the Church embracing change, learning to be more welcoming to explorers, and providing a safe place of acceptance where Christian love can be experienced, whatever a person's lifestyle, there will be possibilities for growth.

Section 4: The context in the Church

Patterns of church attendance

Across the country, church going has become a marginal activity, with only an estimated 7.5% of the population attending regularly on a Sunday. Between 1979 and 1998, the rate of decline in Church attendance increased from 13% to 22%. In particular the Church has experienced a drastic drop in the involvement of children, young people and young adults.

The Methodist statistics are well known and do not need repeating. Although we have seen a recent slight rise in the annual number of people being newly brought into membership, this is against a backdrop of decline where loss of members through death and transfer out has regularly been twice the total number of members gained. However recent research shows that when churches and ministers prioritise making new members, it is possible.

At the same time, we have in the 2002 *Methodist Church Life Profile* a statistically reliable survey of congregational attitudes, compared with those of other denominations. Methodists come over as being loyal, sociable, very involved in the activities of Church life, caring, community-minded and eucharistic. However, compared with other Churches they report themselves to be not very conscious of God's presence, not that keen on prayer groups (they are more likely to be found in a social group), not particularly aware of 'vision' in their church, and reluctant to talk about their faith.

Of course, not every Methodist church looks like this. Some churches really enjoy their young people and attract more. The experience of black majority churches is often a quite different picture, both in terms of growth rather than decline, and in terms of the willingness to talk about faith and to share it with others. However, in some congregations where positions of authority have not been shared with black people, there may be untapped potential and less ownership of the church's mission.

Acknowledging this present reality, we must ask ourselves to what extent we can continue servicing the institution whilst aspiring to move towards something more closely resembling a movement once more. The measures which need to be taken are probably far more radical and pressing than we are comfortable imagining but if they are not taken we may find ourselves swimming (or drowning) in a lake of the last of the summer wine with very few new vineyards planted. Given our limited resources strategic planning is vital in this area!

A growing intention?

Sharing in God's Mission (1985) spoke of that mission falling into three broad categories: evangelism; social caring; the struggle for justice. In doing so, it went some way to clarifying the relationship between the words 'mission' and 'evangelism'. It went on to speak of churches having 'missionary dimensions' (aspects of their life which could be vehicles for mission) but needing 'missionary intention' to drive those vehicles forward.

The recently published resource, *Time to Talk to God* (2005) has picked up on this theme of intentionality and applied it on a personal level. It has been widely welcomed as a stimulus for enabling Christians to verbalize their faith within and then beyond the Church. Other pieces of work which are in the process of production within the Connexional Team are also aimed at facilitating 'intentional Christian conversation' (*Let's Talk* initiative to facilitate conversation; personal faith-sharing resource; inter-faith and evangelism resource). So intentionality, at a corporate or personal level has been on our agendas for 20 years. Is this evidence of progress or of a persisting and un-met challenge?

Measures taken over this period would certainly give evidence of a sharpening of focus. The *Our Calling* process has offered four headings summing up the totality of what the Church is about and gives 'Evangelism' a category all of its own.

In the more recent formulation of *Priorities for the Methodist Church* there is a further sharpening of focus. Up to this point 'New ways of being Church' or 'Fresh Expressions' would have come under the heading 'Evangelism'. Now, however, 'New ways of being Church' is a priority in its own right, albeit inextricably linked to the priority of 'Evangelism'.

On the evidence of this we may say that our connexional intention towards evangelism and speaking of God and faith has increased. On the other hand, the very need for a sharpening of focus on evangelism and for the production of a resource such as *Time to Talk of God* may suggest that that intention has not yet worked itself out to any significant extent in the life of the Church at large.

A deepening commitment?

Having acknowledged a growing intention towards this priority connexionally, we need to examine how this is matched by a commitment of resources to support it. When churches, circuits and districts have placed the *Our Calling* template over their existing work, 'Evangelism' has appeared with striking regularity as the area to which it is most difficult to attribute existing activity. Over recent years we have given ourselves 'dimensions' via which an evangelistic intention may express itself. The extent to which this is happening is variable.

- Vocational discernment has formed part of the initial stages of training for ministry. The pathway of identification, training and deployment for those with evangelistic gifts is, however, not as clearly worked out as that for those with other, more traditional, giftings and callings.

- Conference adopted the report on evangelism and the 'Service for the Commissioning of Evangelists'. This has been used to some extent but the infrequency of its use is symptomatic of a Church which is still moving towards an understanding and acceptance of this role.

- We often speak of the need to stimulate and sponsor imaginative, new ventures in mission but the annual round of stationing is predicated upon an understanding of Church in institutional mode with circuits looking for

ministers to look after churches. Whilst it may be said that ministers only account for a small percentage of God's people and that lay people will be the ones through whom our priorities are achieved, the fact is that what a Church models through the deployment of its leaders speaks loudly to all its people about its priorities.

- The initial deployment of DEEs/ DMEs following the 1993 Conference was uneven and uncertain. In recent years, however, good work has been done in setting up a large number of appointments. A more recent phenomenon is that Circuit Evangelism Enablers are coming on stream. This is evidence of a desire at local level to engage with this priority.

- Strides have been made towards releasing money for mission and one helpful side-effect of decline is that millstone-like buildings can be recycled into more fluid resources with less and less resistance than has been the case hitherto. More of this previously-tied-up money could be used for investment in imaginative, pioneering, movement-like work, risky though this may be.

A widening ownership

The setting of this priority gives an invitation to those of differing theologies and practical experiences of evangelism to move closer together with a common aim. Celebrating our unity within diversity is at the heart of being the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In a broad Church the differences characterised by terms such as 'evangelical', 'liberal' etc. are inevitably present and there can be tensions or simply non-engagement as a result. Clive Marsh makes the point in a provocative way:

'Those that speak a lot of evangelism in the Church aren't often aware of the theological diversity of Emerging Church. Those into Emerging Church sometimes aren't aware that things that seem new are like the liberalism of yesterday. Those who have been/are into liberalism sometimes aren't aware of the post-liberal critiques … This is a massive educational exercise.'

Achieving a widening of ownership whilst at the same time keeping all on board will be difficult and will require willingness to be flexible from all parties. Any acquiescence in and perpetuation of the old divisions of decades past should be firmly resisted. The tone of the recent Conference debate on sexuality should give us encouragement here. Are we glimpsing the beginnings of a future reality of a Methodist Church in Britain in which many members (especially newer ones) are ignorant of such divisions and operate all along the spectrum of theology and practice at the same time?

Evangelism and 'fresh expressions of Church'

'Our practice of evangelism continually challenges our understanding of Church … Sometimes we unwittingly reject the linkage of faith-sharing and church membership because we intuitively realise that our particular Christian community is inappropriate

to the spiritual development [of seekers], but do not go far enough and ask the question, "What kind of Christian community will help these people to truly enter the kingdom of God?"'

<div align="right">(Graham Horsley)</div>

We can only do certain types of evangelism within the churches we have. Fresh expressions of Church are intentionally new ways of being Church, as springboards to evangelism among a wider group of people, and to explore faith and discipleship in fresh contexts. 'Fresh expressions' are not an alternative to the whole Church engaging in evangelism, rather they offer complementary ways of doing evangelism more effectively. It is important not to use 'fresh expressions' as the only model for evangelism, because that could lead to a sense that it is only for pioneers (and therefore, for many churchgoers, something for someone else to address).

Indeed, any renewal movement has the potential for making the mistakes of previous renewal movements, and becoming introverted. But they also have the potential to be a fresh opening for new people into the kingdom of God.

'This is the new evangelism that we can all do.'

'In many places evangelism is not an owned activity of the whole church. It is marginalised as a specialist preserve. Those who engage in it are perceived as either peculiarly gifted, nutty, or just natural extroverts. The idea that every Christian can be an evangelist doesn't register with many people.'
<div align="right">(Viv Morrissey)</div>

We see that the 'old' evangelism is no longer as effective as it once was, and we need to be encouraged to be creative and to try new models, to see the embodiment of what works. Modern expressions of evangelism are far more messy – evangelism and discipleship are wonderfully confused. People can experience worship without knowing it's that. It's legitimate to belong before you believe.

Many who have always championed evangelism now have a greater security and breadth in their approach. There may be places in the Church where the need to make a bigger priority for evangelism is resisted. But the mindset *is* changing. People are glad if the local leadership is on board with the priority, and they recognise that to enable this is going to mean releasing people to focus on this. It is about identifying and mobilising gifts, shifting priorities.

To bring about change, we need accompaniment, mentoring, and practical places to 'have a go'. We need to share stories – but they need to be stories that take the form, 'We prioritised this and devoted £XXX to it per year.' Experience suggests that it takes five years to reap a harvest. There is a need for serious intentionality.

In developing a Methodist approach to evangelism, it's important to build on the strengths of our denominational ethos. We have a tremendous record of community involvement (Methodists are twice as likely as the 'average' Christian to be involved in community action). This has gained us a real credibility in the communities we serve. We can build on this with an appropriate evangelistic strategy.

A second strength is that there is a liberality about Methodism which encourages questioning. This liberality and ability to live with doubt is a strength if it is not over-emphasised, and is a key part of our Arminian tradition.

The ecumenical dimension

'Your report resonates with much that is already familiar territory for us. Confidence building, permission giving, networking and interaction, intentionality, priority and risk-taking, new ways of being Church, releasing, enabling and empowering people, the spirit of the age…' (John Steele, URC)

'The analysis in this report could reasonably be applied to most historic denominations.' (Roger Whitehead)

'For me in the circle of churches where I am involved, the main issue is not whether a church is evangelical or non-evangelical, but whether they are creatively taking evangelistic initiative and encouraging their congregations in witness.' (Robert Freeman, Archdeacon of Halifax, Church of England)

'Far more evangelists and youth workers are employed by Christian Agencies than denominations; far more money is spent on research by Agencies; far more focused work in specialist communities is undertaken.' (Roger Whitehead)

The initial process of consultation about this priority was a Methodist conversation, but a number of ecumenical partners were invited to reflect on an interim draft of this report. A number of themes emerged:
- the issues we are exploring are shared and recognisable across historic denominations, and are not specific to Methodism
- more could be done to share research, debate and national strategies, though the ecumenical Group for Evangelisation has been responsible for a number of initiatives where it is simpler and more effective to do things together (eg the ReJesus website, Mission21 Church Planting Conference)
- fresh expressions of Church at a local level are appropriately engaged in as ecumenical initiatives
- the need for evangelism is recognised across the range of traditional theological approaches
- churches already depend heavily on the work of Agencies committed to supporting evangelism, and many of the these are ecumenical
- training for ministers that is focused on evangelism is being debated, eg the Ordained Pioneer Ministers proposal in the Church of England.

Section 5: Key values and principles

In light of the understanding of evangelism articulated in section 2, and our reading of the contemporary context in society and the Church, we want to assert the following key values and principles.

Incarnation

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory …
From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.'   (John 1:14,16)

'The Word of God dwells richly in the world, the whole world, and within experience,
all experience, not just the experience we choose to label "religious".'   (Barbara Glasson)

In seeking to speak of God and faith within our culture, we in the Church need to embody and reflect the 'grace upon grace' that we ourselves have received, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The encounter should have the qualities we find in the prologue to John's Gospel: creativity, illumination; challenge, empowerment, glory, truth and limitless blessing. For this to be true, we have to inhabit the real world and address the needs felt there and speak the language that makes sense. Just so, the almighty Word humbly entered our world and inhabited our flesh, so that we might see his glory and be touched by it.

The culture of the whole Church needs to shift

'We need a culture that incarnates a thoroughgoing, secure Christianity. But we don't
actually learn how to be this without going into the space where we risk everything.
                                                                (Peter Hancock)

There is a need for the whole Church to own and engage in a shift which gives a higher priority than has been the case to speaking to each other and to those outside the Church about God and faith. This will require all parts of the Church, with its diverse range of theological approaches, to embrace change. Those who have tended to see 'evangelism' as the task of only a special interest group must honestly address their reluctance in this area and explore their own clear calling to make more followers of Jesus Christ, learning from the contemporary wisdom that exists but also developing their own appropriate approach. Those who are currently enthusiastic for evangelism must recognise that 'liberal' theological approaches have integrity and can reach seekers who will never respond to traditional evangelistic teaching. There is risk for us all in this, but the potential for much creativity, mutual respect and growth.
There will be real sacrifice and cost - resurrection does not come about without a process of dying and letting go.

Methodism - a movement of lay witness

'How can we create a more permissive environment in Methodism - to lay down the burden of what we have received and trust the Holy Spirit? To have confidence in ourselves – to be vulnerable rather than venerable.' (Peter Sulston)

'The cutting edge is lay.' (David Deeks)

'We are an institution seeking to become a movement again.' (Viv Morrisey/Jan Nendick)

'While not being conservationists, we need to affirm Methodist heritage – assurance, openness to the world, incarnating in groups the values of faith.' (Peter Hancock)

There is a real paradox here. If a shift in church culture is to be achieved, there are ways of being church which we need to lay down – reluctance to speak about our faith, the undue priority given to the organisation of structures or business, and the monochrome style, time and place of worship. These are all unfortunate features of the Methodism we have inherited. At the same time, we should embrace afresh the founding, Spirit-led 'charism' of our movement 'in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith' (Deed of Union). Early Methodism was predominantly a lay movement, based on the belief that the missionary task belongs to the whole Church. This is also its future.

Confidence in our own spirituality

'What is it we stand for, what would we die for?' (John Nyota)

'Confidence and belief are related: self-confidence and self-belief are the key to the ability to live out of our own questions.' (Barbara Glasson)

'Our bland, nominal "default" does not persuade. It asks too little, not too much.' (Martyn Atkins)

'Many Christians today lack a sufficient grounding in their faith to be able to speak about what they believe, and why.' (Viv Morrissey)

'Evangelism is part of Black people's whole following of Jesus. It is their way of dealing with everyday life, family life, friendships, joys, sorrows and aspirations…to them, there are no 'conditions' to evangelism and neither should it be limited to a particular cultural expression…in love they want to reach out to all.' (Naboth Muchopa)

The response to *Time to Talk of God* suggests that there is a real readiness to encourage growth in discipleship, and to acknowledge and address a culture in the church that is hesitant about talking deeply about our faith. A priority for evangelism needs to be underpinned with a commitment to Christian nurture and mutually supportive (but demanding) accountable discipleship – 'the training and formation of faith-seekers' (Peter Whittaker). Fresh thinking about resources for spirituality can not only make our churches more attractive places for contemporary seekers, but also challenge long-term Christians go deeper on their own spiritual journey, as we 'listen and learn from the demand of popular spirituality for sacred space, silence, stillness and meaningful ritual' (David Emison). In this search, there are riches of holistic Christian spiritual traditions of prayer and contemplation on which we can draw.

It is also not impossible for churches to attract and retain young people. When churches offer engaging, authentic worship, and operate as a community of love, young people find that attractive. We need to equip young Christians to be evangelists in their own setting, and provide ongoing encouragement. We also need to take care about negativity. Obsession with decline is unsettling to children and young people, who are fearful of the church not being there for them in the future. It is not a matter of being in denial, but about making sure that positives are highlighted, to encourage them and give them hope.

If ordinary members are going to want to talk of God, then some personal renewing experience of God is usually necessary. Tom Stuckey speaks about a return to 'edge of Pentecost' activities as described in Acts 1:
- rediscovery of the promises of God
- radical change of our programme and recommitment to each other
- unceasing prayer and waiting
- some reorganisation and reappointment of responsibilities.

Effective communication – real conversation

'We need to remember that our faith story when it is told and celebrated in creative and imaginative ways has inherent power to communicate across all barriers of tradition, culture and age.'
(David Emison)

'It is important that we listen to each other and not just to each other's ideas.'

(Steve Wild)

'The pseudo-Augustinian "preach the Gospel – use words if you have to" is deeply rooted in Methodism, and its commitment to "presence" evangelism. The orality of Christian faith needs recapturing.'
(Martyn Atkins)

*'Yes, "walk the talk". But **do** talk.'*
(John Nyota)

'When mission moves from the centre to the edge, the mode of speech changes. Words of communication are not written but oral, statement becomes story, the verbal idea becomes a visual image, declaration becomes explanation, package becomes pilgrimage.'   (Tom Stuckey)

It has been too easy for us to conclude that there is no need to *talk* about our faith – our lives should suffice as a witness to others. However, it is not clear that these discreet but saintly lives have actually been submitted to the discipline of asking anyone else to hold us accountable for how our lives show forth our Christian commitments.

And it can also be an excuse for not trying to see how the claims of faith can be explained in a culture whose assumptions and language start quite elsewhere. Christian faith and the Bible are indeed 'strange' – we need to use our creativity in a whole range of ways to explore how to bring the stories of faith meaningfully alongside the realities of contemporary culture. We need to be *interested* enough in both the stories and the starting points of other to want to communicate.

Tom Stuckey points out that evangelism is often defined as 'outreach', which feels as if it must be a whole new project within desperately busy lives. He suggests that a more helpful term might be 'downreach', which is about 'allowing the Holy Spirit to deepen our everyday conversations'. This requires no extra time, but it does demand vulnerability. But this is consistent with following a saviour who made himself vulnerable to reach down to us.

We do have to be willing to listen and be changed ourselves. And we need to be able to undertake that active listening which can help people to become attentive to the signs of the kingdom of God. 'Explaining' is not the only model of intentional evangelism. We need to think what message our church buildings are communicating, to be aware of the potential of attractive, 'sacred' space and of the various art forms in stimulating conversation about faith. 'Speaking about faith was much easier with a painting as a focus than it seems to be on a doorstep or in the street' (*Buzz*, November 05, reporting on the Methodist Art Collection exhibition at Norwich Cathedral, 'A Brush with Faith'). The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price show us that the kingdom can be sought for deliberately or 'tripped over' accidentally – but it has to be recognised.

Talking and listening in an inter-faith situation involves engaging with people who already have a deep faith in God, and Christians often find their own faith enriched in the process.

The power of the Bible

'I do believe we need a good dose of the living Word to trigger our own words. Silent witness is no longer enough.   (Tom Stuckey)

'We need to work creatively to bring the Bible alive to ourselves and our contemporary world.'
                                                                (Methodist Council discussion on the Priorities)

'Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.'

(Hebrews 4.12)

One of the key contributions being made by this year's President of Conference is to challenge us to engage in Bible study as a way of 'going deeper' in our speaking of God and faith. It is alarming that for many people, the words 'Bible study' have the capacity to sound boring and off-putting. But the dialogue that we need to have with scripture is a crucial resource for nurturing discipleship and equipping us for evangelism. However, the Bible is not a source book for mission or a tame instrument to wield or use in the service of our own agenda. The stories we are asked to engage with are transformative for us and remind us that we and our world view stand under judgement.

It is of key importance to find accessible ways in which ordinary lay people can have the confidence to read and interpret the Bible together, without feeling that they must depend on the preacher alone to open up the Word.

Commitment to good practice

'A church that doesn't engage in any activity is not likely to develop personal spirituality. We are talking about reflective practitioner training. Don't let's go back to a passive model where action comes last. Let's use active involvement as the basis for training and reflection.'

(Martyn Atkins)

It is important to get away from dated stereotypes about evangelistic methods that some people dread being asked to engage in, and to work with a model of being 'reflective practitioners' as disciples. Every lay person lives out their discipleship not primarily in the Church, but in the ordinary life of the world, and it is in doing this that they need support. We need to be ourselves, with our own style of engaging, not to deliver a programme but to 'empower people to fall in love with God' (Steve Wild).

We need to overcome the idea (as deeply rooted in the Church as the secular world?) that Christianity has been tried and found wanting. The contribution of new Christians with their vibrant excitement about faith in God is vital in this process.

We need people who are confident about the core of their faith, so that they are able to talk about their own story. But it is in trying to speak about the area in which they have confidence that they grow and learn as a result of the dialogue. This leads to reflection and to greater maturity, and sometimes the experience of seeing people come to faith. This, in turn, increases confidence. This can be called 'the evangelistic cycle'.

The Methodist Church would not endorse or encourage any evangelistic methods which are emotionally manipulative, discourage questions, imply that the life of faith is problem-free, or in any way leave people feeling unfree to make their own choices. At the same time, we do not want to encourage people to take refuge in the gospel as an escape route or a cloak for low self-esteem.

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Face to face encounter – people not programmes

'For goodness' sake let us have no more training courses. We should be feeling it, led by the hand to go on and do it.' (Rob Frost)

'We do not need more evangelistic programmes, but how to facilitate.' (Peter Whittaker)

There are no simple, programmatic ways to 'do' evangelism that are guaranteed to work. The only appropriate method is for people to be, do and say what is authentic to them and the context. The major way in which we will support the priority is through the releasing, enabling and empowering of actual people, rather than in developing programmes of content. The practice and skills of facilitation (including facilitating Christian conversation) are key, as well as enabling opportunities for encounter through events.

Any published resources that are produced need to support people in engaging with the primary face to face context.

However, we should not completely do away with the concept of an event that offers a challenge to follow Jesus. The primary influence on people deciding to become Christians is a long-term personal relationship with a Christian, but there are often some critical challenges that happen along the way.

The circuit as a unit of mission

We need to move on from the common perception of the circuit as simply a number of 'preaching places', and from the 'chapel culture' which this perception leads to. Alongside its role in upholding Methodist worship, we need to bring alive the mission-centred purpose for which the circuit was created. While there is a range of on-the-ground understandings about what circuit is meant to do and be, many circuits are actively reviewing their mission and their spending plans, in order to spearhead necessary change, and this is to be encouraged. Circuit life can be re-enlivened, as an experience of being a Connexional Church. Methodism already potentially has a structure which can deliver change. Why not use it?

'The Circuit is the primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement, and help.' (S.O. 500 (1))

'It is about structuring the church for evangelism and mission. Circuits are the natural, geographical areas of mission.' (Martyn Atkins)

'If I had my way … I would make sure that in every circuit there was at least one member of staff, presbyter, deacon or lay-worker, who, having the gift of an

evangelist, was released from pastoral charge and given responsibility for generating a "new form of church".'

(Tom Stuckey, Presidential address to Conference 2005)

Section 6: Objectives for the Church

These objectives are seeking to express a renewed sense of explicit intentionality in engaging in evangelism and speaking of God and faith, and they should be read the light of the range of understandings expressed in prior sections of this report. Evangelism, apologetics and the nurture of discipleship and a culture of Christian conversation within congregations are strands that need to hang together as we seek to renew our confidence in God, in our faith in God, and in our ability to share our faith in God appropriately.

The Methodist Church is seeking:

- to increase confidence in evangelism across the whole Church, not just the parts with a traditionally evangelical approach

- to enable more lay people who feel confident and empowered to speak about their faith to others while still being lifelong seekers themselves, and who are able to help others become attentive to the kingdom of God

- to discover gifts and release resources for evangelism and speaking of God and faith within a renewed movement in which lay people take a lead.

- to encourage churches (whether fresh expressions or mainstream) to become more welcoming and offer real nurture in discipleship as a lifelong journey for all

- to identify and appoint more people who are trained, equipped, deployed and supported for the work of evangelism and apologetics

In order that these objectives might be realised, we would like to see:

Individuals who:
- ask 'Could it be me?' when considering the work of evangelism
- offer welcome to newcomers and participate in programmes that nurture discipleship
- have the opportunities and the courage to 'have a go' at evangelism
- are enabled by presbyters and deacons to do this
- reflect theologically, connecting scripture and experience
- know how to key into networks beyond the church
- can connect culture and faith in authentic ways
- are confident enough to speak about their faith
- are supported and affirmed in witnessing in their daily life

Churches where:
- there are realistic whole-church programmes of evangelism, enabling gifts to emerge, shaping church life
- spiritual transformation is visibly a key priority

- there are opportunities to explore questions arising from current events and issues – locally and in the media
- there are opportunities to take seriously critiques and challenges to faith
- people are expected to be part of nurture groups
- space is made for deeper conversations by stopping some business meetings
- the physical space is attractive and warm
- there are opportunities for articulating faith
- people's gifts are spotted and they are told
- relationships are prioritised over tasks and administration
- there is help in keying into networks beyond the church
- there are opportunities to reflect theologically, connecting scripture and experience
- testimony is valued, encouraged and shared
- there are inspirational events to ignite passion
- there are meeting points for people from differing faith perspectives
- there is engagement with the local culture and context
- opportunities are sought to build partnerships with other denominations in the areas of evangelism and speaking of God and faith

Circuits where:
- circuit policy is driven by the priority of evangelism and speaking of God and faith
- circuit policy prioritises the development of gifts for evangelism and apologetics (ordained and lay)
- as part of its encouragement of vocational exploration there are 'talent scouts' to spot people gifted in evangelism and apologetics
- staff are stationed to be pioneers in the area of fresh expressions and evangelism
- presbyters, deacons, lay workers, local preachers and worship leaders all themselves model lifelong learning and committed discipleship
- the local preachers/worship leaders study days are a power-house
- there is an exciting range of nurture opportunities – across the age range
- lay people are trained to lead discipleship groups and in the skills of group facilitation
- local preachers and worship leaders are encouragers and enablers
- there are inspirational events to ignite passion
- there are opportunities to reflect theologically, connecting scripture and experience
- opportunities are sought to build/develop partnerships with other churches and/or agencies in the interests of evangelism and speaking of God and faith
- there are opportunities to explore questions arising from current events and issues – locally and in the media
- there are opportunities to take seriously critiques and challenges to faith

Districts where:

- district policy is driven by the priority of evangelism and speaking of God and faith
- District Advance Funds are used imaginatively in pursuance of this priority (which will include the deployment of staff and the improvement of worship and meeting space)
- the implications for the evangelism priority are worked out in the stationing process
- priority is given to key appointments which are created in response to this priority
- resources and training in evangelism and speaking of God and faith are offered
- there are opportunities to reflect theologically, connecting scripture and experience
- there are inspirational events to ignite passion
- networks are provided to empower people and give them confidence
- there are opportunities to explore questions arising from current events and issues – locally and in the media
- there are opportunities to take seriously critiques and challenges to faith

A Connexion where:

- the implications for the evangelism priority are worked out in the stationing process
- priority is given to key appointments which are created in response to this priority
- the stationing forms are re-worded to include *Our Calling* and the Priorities
- stationing policy includes the opening up of evangelistic and apologetic posts
- candidating and selection have evangelism calling/skills as key dimension
- Training principles and provision reflect evangelism priority
- CDIM provision reflects evangelism priority, and skills in adult learning
- Every communication conveys a clear branding – excellent quality and a commitment to evangelism, apologetics and discipleship
- the approach is coordinated and not ad hoc
- resources for nurture – all groups – children's and young people's resources – are up to date
- there are opportunities to reflect theologically, connecting scripture and experience
- there are inspirational events to ignite passion
- resources and training in this area are offered
- access to networks is provided, to empower people and give them confidence.

Recommendations of Project 1

Remit

Convene a consultation to draw out a wide range of imaginative suggestions, appropriate to a diverse Church, of what could be entailed by 'evangelism and speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved.'

Interim report

An interim report which provides the rationale for the recommendations we now bring was debated by the Methodist Council in February 2006 after extensive consultation. The report has received wide support and is being downloaded and used in local churches. It was also presented to one of the new Conference Forums in Edinburgh, and the subject attracted more interest than any other. The full report is not repeated here but may be accessed at:
http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/psru_project1reporttocouncil0106.doc
There are also key arguments included in Project 1's submission to the filters process (7/12/06), which should be read in conjunction with these recommendations.

The following objectives were identified in the interim report:

'Objectives for the Church

These objectives are seeking to express a renewed sense of explicit intentionality in engaging in evangelism and speaking of God and faith, and they should be read in the light of the range of understandings expressed in the whole of this report. Evangelism, apologetics and the nurture of discipleship and a culture of Christian conversation within congregations are strands that need to hang together as we seek to renew our confidence in God, in our faith in God, and in our ability to share our faith in God appropriately.

The Methodist Church is seeking:

- to increase confidence in evangelism across the whole Church, not just the parts with a traditionally evangelical approach

- to enable more lay people who feel confident and empowered to speak about their faith to others while still being lifelong seekers themselves, and who are able help others become attentive to the Kingdom of God

- to discover gifts and release resources for evangelism and speaking of God and faith within a renewed movement in which lay people take a lead

- to encourage churches (whether fresh expressions or mainstream) to become more welcoming and offer real nurture in discipleship as a lifelong journey for all

- to identify and appoint more people who are trained, equipped, deployed and supported for the work of evangelism and apologetics.'

Recommendation 1 – adopting these objectives for the Church

Recognising the wide recognition these objectives have enjoyed throughout the Connexion, we recommend that they be incorporated in the report about Team Focus/Priorities in Practice, which is brought to the Methodist Conference 2007 for adoption.

Because these objectives are seen to be priorities, the work of the Connexional Team should be such as to support the Church in developing these objectives. In drafting our recommendations for the Connexional Team, we have borne in mind the guidelines that we should focus on these functions:

- what must be fulfilled by the Connexional Team
- what can best be fulfilled by the Connexional Team
- what can be undertaken by the Connexional Team that will support and resource functions that must be undertaken elsewhere

The following recommendations are based on the proposed future Team structure described in *Priorities in Practice* (October 2006). (There was concern, expressed by some members of the group, about the breadth of the Christian Communication and Advocacy section and what would be the emphasis of evangelism, apologetics and discipleship (as well as fresh ways of being Church) in relation to the other areas of work within that section.)

Recommendation 2 – skills and knowledge within the Team

a) *Expertise, track record and passion for evangelism, apologetics and the nurture of discipleship should be present within the strategic leadership team (red level)*

b) *Also within the strategic leadership, there must be experience of and an understanding of the dynamics of fresh ways of being Church.*

c) *The 'green' level senior manager (Christian Communication and Advocacy), who will be managing a complex multi-disciplinary team will need to have not only senior management skills but a demonstrable commitment to the priority for speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense, and will themselves be a credible communicator.*

d)   It is important that the 'green' senior managers should meet regularly and plan jointly, so that the priority of speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense is delivered across the team in a way that is accountable to the strategic leadership.

e)   Evangelism (including fresh ways of being Church), apologetics and discipleship should be held together as a team of specialist resource people (yellow).

f)   This sub team should be headed by a team leader/section head who has passion for speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense, and considerable track record in resourcing/mentoring others within the Church to be effective and innovative in this area.

g)   All the staff reporting to the Christian Communication and Advocacy manager need to be able to engage with and resource Methodists across the range of theological approaches.

Recommendation 3 – functions of the specialist team

The functions that the specialist team will deliver (sometimes in collaboration with others through time-limited projects) are:

a)   supporting district evangelism enablers/mission enablers through coaching, mentoring and professional development, and advice to districts on recruitment best practice for these roles

b)   undertaking research/ keeping up with research on evangelism, discipleship, fresh expressions of Church, church and contemporary culture and disseminating outcomes to the Methodist Church

c)   reviewing, recommending and where appropriate developing resources in these areas

d)   developing and maintaining accessible and helpful website pages in these areas, including the Interface website

e)   offering consultancy to districts and circuits where it is possible to add value to work already undertaken by DEEs or others

f) acting as specialists, consultants or occasional training deliverers to strategic events or conference (eg superintendents)

g) networking ecumenically to ensure that everything in this area that can be done together, is so done

h) generating policy papers (eg for Conference) as appropriate

i) convening and servicing working groups where this specialist expertise is required (eg the successor to Interface/apologetics resource group for Faith and Order)

j) resourcing the rest of the Connexional Team in order to develop their capacities in the above areas

k) resourcing the Connexional Leadership Team, including consulting to districts in recruiting a new chair, assisting with the induction of new chairs, *and consultancy and support for Chairs who are seeking to develop strategies relating to evangelism, apologetics, discipleship (and fresh ways of being church).*

Recommendation 4 – implications for communication strategy

It can be demonstrated that excellent and continuing communication has an impact on how local churches see the importance and salience of an issue and how much activity is generated around it. This means that the 'branding' of the Connexional Team needs to convey, consistently and in a purposive way through its explicit and implicit messages, the priority for speaking about God and faith in ways that make sense.

a) The communications strategy for the Connexional Team should convey the priority for evangelism and speaking of God and faith as major 'core business' of the Methodist Church.

b) To ensure coherent branding, the Christian Communications and Advocacy department should have the responsibility for managing the communications strategy for the whole Connexional Team.

c) The whole Methodist website, not only the Interface site or the pages on evangelism and discipleship, needs to demonstrate the priority for evangelism and speaking of God and faith.

d) Staffing in the communications team should include capacity to develop website, media, advocacy and publications programmes that proactively support this priority.

e) Whatever the outcome of the negotiations with mph about production and design staff, there must be retained in the Team at least the staff for editorial commissioning capacity for publications, so that there can be a continuing line-managed strategy that remains within the control of the Team.

Recommendation 5 – implications for training

We hope to see within the developing Regional Training Partnerships, and in the growth of circuit based groups for 'extending discipleship and exploring vocation', a wealth of opportunities for the whole people of God to learn and grow in confidence in evangelism and in speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved.

Vocational discernment should include an expectation that some will be called to be evangelists, and that all must take this priority seriously. Selection for authorised ministries should not proceed as if 'one size fits all'. Training should be able to allow people to 'major' on evangelism, rather than everywhere preparing people to be deployed in any station. All students need to address evangelism and apologetics, including core skills and attitudes. Ministers need to be able to lead the Church in such a way that the priority comes through, irrespective of their theological approach.

a) Evangelism (including fresh ways of being Church), apologetics and discipleship should be key elements in strategies for learning and development for the whole people of God, including in the vocational discernment, initial training and continuing development of those in authorised ministries.

b) In recognition of the Connexional role of Cliff College and in particular its focus on lay ministries and on evangelism and discipleship, we recommend that it should receive core funding.

c) We recommend that this core funding should replace the current arrangements whereby elements of Cliff posts are funded by the Connexional Team, but that the principle of collaborative working between Cliff staff and the specialist team reporting to Christian Communication and Advocacy should be preserved, and particular links and shared tasks be negotiated and periodically reviewed.

Recommendation 6 – implications for stationing and deployment

We recognise an urgency in the present context to find ways of releasing people with the appropriate gifts to pioneer approaches in evangelism and in fresh ways of being Church.

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a)   The districts should be challenged to create incentives for circuits to develop posts for authorized ministries that will enable the realisation of this priority.

b)   Stationing committee is asked to develop processes that can match people to these posts.

c)   The Connexion as a whole and districts in particular are asked to develop creative ways of supporting, funding, training and deploying lay evangelists.

Some assumptions

We note that the priority which has been at the heart of the remit for Project 1 has implications for every area of the Team. Some of these are the subject of other ground clearing projects. We note in particular:

- Recognising the significant contribution that Training and Development Officers have already made to this priority, we would hope to see them continue to enable and equip churches and circuits in collaboration with others in speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved (Project 2)

- There are clear links between our priority and that of Mission education (Project 4)

- The context in which we speak of God and faith is currently one in which inter-faith issues are paramount.

- We are assuming adequate capacity within the future Team with regard to children's and youth work, resources for mission, grant making, and advocacy.

Revised JM 24/10/06

Priorities into Practice: Team Focus

Improving Advocacy

A report from Project 4 Management Group: Anthea Cox, Coordinating Secretary; Peter Sulston, Coordinating Secretary; Graham Thompson, Chair of District; Graham Sparkes, Baptist Union; Nigel Varndell, Christian Aid and PSRU: Peter Relf, Anne Topping, Trevor Durston

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Introduction

The original brief for Project 4 was to 'draw together the work of public issues staff, Methodist Relief and Development Fund (MRDF), World Action (WA) and Mission Education (ME), with a view to improving advocacy and communication'. There are two ways we have developed this brief.

First, after representation from other parts of the Connexional Team who also have an advocacy role (based on our definitions in 1a below), we have increased the range of 'strands' mentioned in the brief to include them. We therefore include, for example, Women's Network and Racial Justice, as well as groups that work on the prayer handbook and '_momentum_' newspaper. A widened brief like this makes clear that this report is about improving the advocacy of the Methodist Church's mission and ministry in Britain and worldwide, and thereby also improving the advocacy of Methodist theological perspectives on contemporary issues.

Second, we have recognised that implications we draw about communication matters should be referred to the Project which will be looking at all aspects of communication so that a properly co-ordinated approach can be taken.

1   What we mean by 'advocacy'

The following may be helpful in visualising a bigger picture for advocacy work.

A priority or issue is identified, for example by Conference. This is to run for a period of time, and all sections of the Connexional Team will contribute to and support, as appropriate. The campaigns of other agencies (and the lead taken by key partners such as Christian Aid) will need to be considered to ensure supportive or complementary approaches. There may need to be a subtle mix of 1 or 2 major issues lasting over a couple of years, and a sequence of short-term issues lasting for a few months each. These shorter-term issues could include specific causes like disaster response.

Within this vision there would be a continuum of expression which includes both internal and external elements of advocacy – all focussed on the chosen issue. This may be described as:

• Communication and education among the Methodist people. This is aimed at alerting people to the issue, and helping them to appreciate its nature and complexity.
• Mobilising this constituency. This includes prayer, action (local campaigns, pressure on MPs, etc), and giving; to fund national or international action on specific projects associated with the chosen issue.
• Raising public awareness and seeking maximum media coverage. This develops out of a mobilised constituency, and aims to develop a wider groundswell of support to which politicians and government have to take notice. In some cases this will be in partnership with other Church groups or agencies.
• Applying national and international pressure on key people or governments – aimed at bringing about the change expressed in the chosen issue.

▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Individual elements within the Connexion						

Each element of the Connexional Team, together with other associated groups, networks and partnerships, would then have their part to play in championing the chosen issue and driving it towards the desired outcome. The various networks would be very effective in mobilising the different age and gender groups within the Methodist people. World Church Office, Public Issues, Communications, MRDF and other networks each have their specialist role to play in all parts of the continuum according to their expertise.

Issues will differ greatly, and not all will have national or international implications. The continuum shown above therefore may stop short of major national or international campaigns in some instances.

Similarly the desired outcomes will vary. Some aim at major policy change in international arenas, or for specific country governments. Some may focus on raising significant funds for an ongoing or emergency situation. Others are to raise awareness and change attitudes in society. The desired outcome (or multiple outcomes) of each issue needs to be clear at the outset.

MRDF needs special consideration because it is a separate charity with its own governing structure, yet anchored in the Methodist Connexion. It needs to be free to continue its own agenda of advocacy and fundraising for its projects, while influencing and supporting the major issues adopted by the Connexional Team. However it also needs positive interaction with the World Church Office to maximise coordination of programmes and grants. Effective formal and informal links are needed to ensure this.

It is important to note that the above has concentrated on identifying and running with major advocacy issues which would have (or be perceived to have) the official stamp of the Methodist Church. In addition to this there will be any number of local issues dealt with by interested Churches or groups at local level. These need to be recognised and appreciated, and a mechanism should be in place for those that have more national or international concern to be brought to the attention of the Connexional Team who may wish to adopt it as a chosen cause.

1a

If an advocate seeks to help and support, to be an ally who acts on one's behalf and who presents a case in the best possible light, then advocacy is the process of acting in these ways. The word has also become linked with organised activism that supports a particular cause (like Make Poverty History) and with the campaigning that promotes it. In Methodism, it is associated with championing an area of work supported by a fund; Mission in Britain, World Mission, Property, Ministers' children or MRDF.

1b

From this background, we have drawn two meanings for 'advocacy' that have helped shape our thinking:

- internal advocacy

    clear and accessible communication with the Methodist people

    Here, advocacy enables Methodists to be alerted to issues, to appreciate their nature and complexity and are prompted to consider how Methodist perspectives can suggest appropriate responses.

- external advocacy

    sharing beyond the Methodist community to influence and affect the outlooks, decisions and commitments of others

    This may range from speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all concerned (dealt with in the report of Project 1 on Evangelism) to what we call 'decision-maker advocacy'- that is, sharing Methodist policy or perspectives with those who make decisions, especially on matters that affect social justice, in order to influence outcomes.

1c

Advocacy, understood as both its internal and external aspects, is not to be seen as an "add-on" but as key to developing commitment, conviction and energy across the whole church. It can raise awareness of the Methodist Church's mission and ministry, of Methodist theology and perspectives and of the gospel as connecting to the whole life of people and communities.

1d

Advocacy that is targeted and well-crafted prompts initial recognition and goes on to invite further exploration, awareness of complexity, reflection and deepening understanding. It is a key activity for a Church that aspires to be a community of disciples seeking to practise personal and social holiness, to bear witness to their faith and to invite others to join them.

Advocacy is first and foremost directed at affecting change. The changes sought might be:

- *within individuals and congregations*
- *policy of; the Connexion,*
              external partners,
              government and

other agents of secular society

- *attitudes in society.*

The fundamental aim of advocacy materials is to change hearts and minds so that individuals and the whole Church respond to God's call in appropriate and effective ways.

1e
As mind and heart are engaged, such advocacy will prompt one or more of these responses:

- **Prayer**

- *Action*

- **Giving**

1f
Advocacy is therefore the task of the whole Church, and part of the discipleship of *all* its members, lay and ordained. In some cases, however, *specific people* are called upon to raise issues and speak on behalf of the Church. This raises three related questions:

- How can advocacy be encouraged in every part of the work of the Church (including publications and other means of communication it produces) and in the life of its members?

- What, if any, specialist resources of people or materials are needed to support this general aim?

- How can people be identified and supported in speaking on behalf of the Church (both internally and externally) without undermining the general aim of involving the whole church in advocacy?

1g
These questions underline the links between advocacy and the concerns of Project 1 (Evangelism) and Project 5 (Communications). All three projects need to cross-refer and illuminate each other on matters relating to advocacy.

1h
The PMG felt that The Methodist Church would benefit if it articulated the underpinning theology for advocacy in relation to its Calling and its Priorities.

The people of God have always been formed as a direct consequence of God's self-communication and in turn have been called to respond by themselves being communicators or advocates. That advocacy is directed both towards God in prayer and worship and towards others, communicating something of God. That advocacy may take place in a variety of ways: through word or action, attitude or

behaviour, directly or indirectly. This is true in the present self-understanding of the Methodist Church.

Each of the dimensions and methods of Christian mission identified in the 1996 Statement of Purpose of the Methodist Church (telling the good news of Jesus, calling people to faith in Jesus Christ and to Christian discipleship, caring for individual people and communities, sharing in the task of education and social and spiritual development, struggling for a just world, being alongside the poor, becoming friends with people of different cultures and faiths, caring for the earth and building partnerships with other churches and other groups who share some of our mission aims) implies advocacy in one form or another.

In the broadest sense *Our Calling* can be understood as a call to advocacy: "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." We are called to advocate the gospel of God's love in Christ in the life of church and society. That is done through the four aspects of *Our Calling*: worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. Advocacy is close to the heart of a Methodist response to the gospel: witness the key phrases of *Our Calling* summarised in this sentence:

> *The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love; to help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support and care; to become a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice and to make more followers of Jesus Christ.*

The same zeal for advocacy of the gospel is implicit in the whole tone of *Priorities for the Methodist Church* and various phrases in that statement. For example:

o   A renewed confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church are both cause and consequence of the proclamation and affirmation of "God's love in Christ for us and for all the world".

o   *Those who aspire to a greater "confidence in evangelism" and who desire to find ways "to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved" have already made a commitment to developing effective advocacy and if those intentions are carried through with consistency and integrity then there will be better and more coherent advocacy.*

1i

The questions (paragraph 1f above) also raise an issue about decision-maker advocacy (referred to in 1b *above* as part of 'external advocacy'), which responds to issues that are raised in wider society, as part of a public, often secular, agenda: how best to canvas and influence decision-makers on public issues.

The context of public issues illustrates how the responses of prayer, action and giving can find particular expressions:

Prayer   Advocacy can encourage prayer which, for Christians who believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, is just as much advocacy as making a response to a government consultation or writing a letter to an MP. Prayer expresses the dual calling of the individual Christian and the Church to love of God and neighbour, and also the interaction of faith and concern for social justice that deepens both. It will stimulate both imagination and commitment.

Action   Advocacy can spark individual or group action and even mass action.

Each of these responses could be part of a campaigning approach to both the internal and the external aspects of advocacy, not least decision-maker advocacy.

The first aim of internal advocacy is to motivate. In the context of Methodist audiences, effective advocacy materials would therefore stimulate understanding and encourage Methodists to discern their calling in a more focussed way and offer their time and talents in Church and society accordingly.

In relation to decision-maker advocacy, the evidence is that this is almost always best done working as part of coalitions, networks or partnerships. In this way advocacy draws on many more perspectives and is more representative and is more likely to lead to action.

Giving   Advocacy can invite people to give or raise money to support a particular concern or need that is part of the Church's mission and ministry. There is good evidence that when people are persuaded of the merits of a cause they will give money to support it, if asked. Motivation remains the first requirement in stimulating new giving but realism also recognises the many claims on people's giving so that persuasion to direct giving in specific ways is also necessary.

1j
The preparation of advocacy materials that stimulate understanding and encourage response: prayer, action, giving, will need to include careful targeting to take into account the varied contexts, experiences and assumptions of those being addressed.

1k
With such an understanding, it is clear that advocacy embraces the need to draw in funds to support the work, so a church that is committed to *'Improving advocacy'* needs to address fund-raising too.

2   Why there is a need to change

2a
The definitions of advocacy given above have not been articulated or agreed across the Methodist Connexion and are not the way in which the Connexional Team currently works to 'deliver' advocacy. Different understandings and emphases have developed in different parts of the Team. There are different expectations within the Methodist Church of what advocacy should be and do. The main reason for this is that, at present, the Methodist Church, as a whole does not have a co-ordinated or systematic approach to advocacy (including campaigning and fund-raising). A co-ordinated and systematic approach is required.

2b
At present, advocacy is spread across many parts of the Connexional Team. Among those who have significant involvement in advocacy are Public Issues and International Affairs, Mission Education, Racial Justice, JMA, World Action,

Women's Network, Interface and Communications. Individuals and congregations are confused, bombarded even, by this way of organising advocacy. It has been possible for different parts of the Team to be working without reference to each other on very similar issues. The brief for the Project Management Group on *Improving advocacy* has been to suggest how to 'draw together' strands like these in some way in order to improve advocacy.

2c

The inclusion of MRDF in the project brief pointed us not only to considering the improvement of advocacy with others beyond the Connexional Team, but also to considering the Methodist Church's approach to fund-raising. Since 1996 MRDF has been related to but not directly part of the Connexional Team with its own particular staffing arrangements. It has thrived in the niche it has created, adopting its own increasingly successful approach to advocacy and fund-raising, with its distinctive voice and work.

The current arrangements pose questions for the Connexional Team and for the trustees of MRDF when considering how the Methodist Church as a whole might improve advocacy, remembering that this discussion needs to include shared priorities and desired outcomes

*The relationship between MRDF and the Connexional Team is different from the Team's relationship with 'external' partners, such as NCH and Christian Aid. There is ambiguity in such a relationship - it can be a source of tension as well as creativity. In the light of the recommendations made in '*Team Focus*', there is merit in exploring whether it is better for MRDF to have a closer relationship to the Team. An additional complication in either scenario is the relationship between the Methodist Church and Christian Aid. It could be seen that the Methodist Church is running its own fund (MRDF) as a potential competitor to Christian Aid (Christian Aid is an agency of the churches in Britain and Ireland, including the Methodist Church in Britain).*

The PMG has come to the view that there needs to be clear agreement with Christian Aid so that it can act as the lead development agency of the Methodist Church. There needs to be clarification of the subsequent relationship with MRDF and coordination between all this work and the development work undertaken through the World Church Office. The PMG believes that by clearly establishing relationships and by enabling the lead in development to be taken by the largest agency, there can be synergy, clarity and a great improvement in advocacy.

The project group took time to look at the spread of advocacy delivery. It came to the conclusion that advocacy should be brought together in one place with specialists who could coordinate and manage this aspect of work.

2d

Methodist Church fund-raising has its own history which has led to a present situation that professional fund-raisers would regard as ineffective. MRDF's success shows that funds can be attracted when the cause is clearly articulated and money is asked for. By contrast, the 2003 Conference decision that Methodist Church fund-raising literature be general and even-handed, inviting donations to several funds, is much less satisfactory. One of the factors behind the Conference decision was the wish to keep separate and

distinct the Fund for Home Mission and the Fund for World Mission. A summary of contributions received by the various funds appears in the Appendix.

Ironically, the advocacy of the Methodist Church's mission and ministry is being hampered by a quest for even-handedness. There are times when the domestic and the international have a common agenda for mission and/or public issues, when Mission and Relief & Development go hand-in-hand. At such times clear and strong advocacy will generate energy for prayer, action and giving.

The PMG has considered the advocacy implications of there being several funds. Although this has been debated fairly recently by Conference the difficulties caused by multiple funds continue to confuse and disable any advocacy processes. The PMG came to a view that this needs addressing, ideally by combining the funds in some way.

2
The Team Focus process will result in a reduced Connexional Team and emphasises the need for partnership working, project working and flexibility. This gives the opportunity to consider how essential a unilateral and full-time approach to advocacy is, particularly on matters that have no distinctive denominational flavour.

3   What a co-ordinated approach to advocacy will achieve

3a

Improvements in outcomes

3a: 1
Mission initiatives possibly, direct

Co-ordination of advocacy will enable support for and,

participation in mission-centred initiatives in Britain and across the world. Methodists will not be faced with competing initiatives. With proper co-ordination, timing of education, campaigning and fund-raising will be right both for the initiatives themselves and for the Methodist people.

3a: 2
Methodist views service that

Co-ordination of advocacy will enable the provision of a

makes Methodist policy and Methodist perspectives easily accessible to all. It will enable Methodists to discuss views about contemporary issues. Also, it will draw together the separate strands, such as those listed in 2b.

3a: 3
Fund-raising Methodist Church's

Co-ordination of advocacy will resolve anomalies in the

approaches to its various funds, so that the Church's initiatives could more effectively encourage Methodists to pray, act *and* give. A co-ordinated approach to fund-raising that raises voluntary giving will enable new mission initiatives to be supported and could even, in a few years, reduce assessment levies on Districts and Circuits.

3a: 4
Partnerships
sustain –

Co-ordination of advocacy will make partnerships easier to

perhaps with some of the current strands operating ecumenically, or working with other organisations, agencies or institutions. Partnerships will show how a Methodist initiative and another organisation's work complement each other, perhaps even become a joint venture.

3b

Improvements in strategy

3b: 1
New technology
into a single

Co-ordination of advocacy will draw together various strands

unit, making fuller use of information technology. Networks of Methodists and others (paid and unpaid) who communicate largely by electronic means will be contracted to contribute to Methodist policy-making and Methodist strategies for internal and external advocacy. Other networks may need to be recruited, 'animated', co-ordinated, sustained and evaluated in order to ensure the provision of appropriate support.

3b: 2
Communication
reshaping of

Co-ordination of advocacy will need to be a key part of the

the Connexional Team's communication strategy.

4   Ways of making improvements

4a

Ecumenical partnerships

'Priorities for the Methodist Church' encourages partnership with others wherever possible.   From September 2006 the Methodist Church with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church has been piloting the Joint Public Issues Team. Experience shows that ecumenical partnerships on matters where partner Churches share common ground adds weight to argument, particularly in decision-maker advocacy, but also in some aspects of internal advocacy. Here, there is scope for improvement of effectiveness in advocacy and also opportunity to save costs.

For example, the Connexional Team currently has direct contact with Parliamentarians in the Lords and Commons, business and trades union leaders, providing a high-quality service in a range of forms of decision-maker advocacy. Interest in ecumenical provision of such a service indicates the value in which it is held, but also reveals its high cost and

(at present) the disproportionate investment of Methodism relative to other Free Churches.

On some matters there will still be a need for expression of Methodist emphases and concerns. Ecumenical partnerships will not, by themselves, be able to deliver all that is needed in these circumstances, so we also need to consider some way of delivering internal and external advocacy that can be denomination-specific. The work of any ecumenical partnership on decision-maker advocacy and the work on internal and external advocacy being developed by the Methodist Church's Interface group will need careful distinction and co-ordination.

4b

Partnerships with agencies

The Methodist Church has positive experience of working with a variety of different agencies such as NCH, MHA, LWPT (formerly LPMA), MPH, Christian Aid, Methodists for World Mission and many more. For some initiatives (like the '*momentum*' newspaper), clear parameters and purposes are stated and shared by the partners. Other partnerships may be less formal as part of a well-established relationship. That situation can be healthy, but it can sometimes lead to difficulties.

Regular review of partnerships will help define clear parameters and purposes and help nurture positive relationships. Some advocacy work that the Connexional Team has been doing might be done by partner agencies as a natural part of their work. Some advocacy work that the Connexional Team has been doing might be done by new agencies.

Whichever route is taken on ecumenical partnerships and partnerships with agencies, there will be a need for careful co-ordination of advocacy to achieve the improvements in outcomes described in 3a *above*.

4c

Networks

Methodism is familiar with networks for advocacy – sometimes almost informal (like Interface – the apologetics group), sometimes much more organised (like Women's Network). There is a growing recognition of a need to move towards a more systematic approach to networking that draws from a range of people with knowledge, understanding, expertise, skills and local perspectives.

New technology makes such networking much easier. At the same time, networking demands careful co-ordination to find, 'animate', sustain, evaluate and 'hibernate' or closed network groups for particular advocacy purposes. There is already experience across the Connexional Team of co-ordinating networks for advocacy, but it is often done piecemeal, sometimes with duplication of effort and with the potential for conflicting emphases. If the Methodist Church is to make more use of networks, then a more co-ordinated approach to networking will be needed.

'*Team Focus*' indicates that the use of networks is one way that some of the Team's work could be done. It is clear that co-ordinated networks offer a significant way of developing both internal and external advocacy, but the co-ordination will need to include service level agreements, rigorous monitoring and evaluation as well as the scope to modify, withdraw from, withdraw support for or close a network that is not delivering the required level of service.

4d
Fundraising

As identified in section 1j of this paper, a commitment to better advocacy will need to draw in additional funds to the Connexional Team. To do this effectively it is essential that there is an agreed fundraising strategy that identifies:

- a clear need that individuals or organizations can respond to
- target audiences and chosen fundraising methods
- clear communications channels
- dedicated fundraising materials
- support services to ensure that fundraising is effective and well monitored.

The provision of expertise in the field of fund-raising, that enables the Methodist Church to access funds from beyond itself or as additional voluntary donations from existing members, would be a significant step change within the Connexional Team. However, as financial demands are keenly felt, now is the time to make developments in this area.

In order to provide such a service, not only would the recommendations about advocacy need to be accepted but so would the provision of fund-raising personnel within the Connexional Team.

5   Possible steps towards a co-ordinated approach

5a

In-house development

If partnership with others is to be taken seriously, then the Connexional Team needs to demonstrate that it can make internal partnerships work. Present arrangements have sometimes led to solo initiatives in aspects of advocacy and unhelpful, even competing, relationships between different parts of the Team. A co-ordinated approach to advocacy could bring together different aspects of the life of the Methodist Church including the Connexional Team's:

- *Public issues and international affairs*
- *Advice on ethical investment*
- *World Action*
- *JMA*
- *Mission Education*
- *Methodist Prayer Handbook*
- *Women's Network and 'Magnet' magazine*
- *Racial Justice*
- *Equality and diversity*

- *Interface*
- *'momentum' newspaper*
- *aspects of*
    - *Continuing Development in Ministry (CDiM)*
    - *Continuing Local Preacher Development (CLPD)*
    - *Spirituality and pastoral care*

When various parts of the Team recognise common or related concerns and work collaboratively in what could be described as a project approach it can be a very effective way of working. In-house co-ordination will promote such collaborative working and enable effective project management which draws on appropriate expertise from the Team itself, from networks (Methodist / ecumenical) and sometimes from the wider world.

There will need to be negotiations with the MRDF trustees to clarify the relationship between the Fund and the Team. MRDF is a legally autonomous body but the trustees may wish to either strengthen the relationship with the Connexional Team or move towards a closer relationship with another organisation. Part of the clarification process will need to check how manageable it is for MRDF trustees to meet the objectives of relief and development in the fulfilment of their responsibility to the trust and their relationship to the Methodist Council.

A single, co-ordinated approach to advocacy would need to:
- *be skills-based rather than issues-based*
- *keep in touch with issues and opinions in Circuits and Districts*
- *inspire and inform policy thinking*
- *communicate Methodist Church policy*
- *manage messages, communications, timings and settings in a project approach*
- *enable a more mission-oriented approach*
- *enable informed discussion of contemporary issues*
- *bring a co-ordinated and professional approach to fund-raising*
- *provide a 24-7 support service for those representing Methodist Church perspectives (e.g. in decision-maker advocacy)*
- *make use of new technology and contracted networks.*

With an approach to advocacy like this, there could be a co-ordinated web-site and telephone help-desk that offered information, advice and support. Indeed, an advocacy function could be linked to (and served by) a cluster of communications functions like media relations, design & production and web-site management.

5b

Other partnerships

Some aspects of a co-ordinated advocacy approach could be delegated to a new ecumenical group or to another organisation (for example, NCH and/or MHA) whose work has a close affinity to that of the Methodist Church. Partnership could be built in from the outset of a co-ordinated approach, especially if:

- *the overall remit for a co-ordinated approach was clear*

- *the scope of the delegated work was clear (with contract[s] and service-level agreement[s])*
- *contract management arrangements were properly in place.*

Already there is some sharing ecumenically on decision-maker advocacy. It would be important to formalise this work in the ways described above if development of such sharing were to become a key aspect of a co-ordinated advocacy approach.

5c
Team implications

Arrangements for advocacy will need to bring together into one advocacy team a small number of people who have particular specialisms, but who are knowledgeable enough and flexible enough to address issues in other areas. The Connexional Team currently employs people in specialist areas who have sensitivities and skills that could be used more widely. It also has access to people in the Methodist Church and beyond who are already in a network, or who could become part of a network. Any use of a network would have to be significantly different from a specialist role that was to be made redundant. The employment profile of this part of the Connexional Team could be very different if the general direction of these proposals were to be adopted.

5d
Methodist Church implications

It is right that the Methodist Conference oversees the overall aims, purposes and results of advocacy and fund-raising for the Methodist Church. It will be more appropriate if the Methodist Council (which meets more frequently) approves developments in approaches to advocacy and fund-raising. The Connexional Team leadership will then be able to steer decision-making in the light of developments approved by the Council. Clearly, careful consultation will be needed for a proposal like this to be put to the Methodist Conference.

5e
Funds

We believe that Methodist Funds (World Mission, Home Mission and Methodist Church Funds) should be drawn together into one fund. The PMG recognises that work needs to be undertaken to build in safeguards to the subsequent distribution of spending from such funds so that respect is shown both to historical commitments and developing priorities. However, it would not wish the main thrust of this report to be lost because of concerns about this particular matter and, therefore, is inviting the Methodist Council, through JSG, to consider a further review of this issue.

6.   Recommendations

6.1   Establish more effective and flexible processes for governance, which enable rather than disable advocacy, campaigning and fundraising.

The Methodist Council should set a general advocacy policy framework governing how specific issues should be selected and championed, and the criteria to be used for those issues that because of their strategic importance or high financial implications, would specifically need Council approval.

   i)   The Council delegates responsibility for developing and implementing strategies to ensure the outworking of the policy to the proposed advocacy group (see paragraph 6.3) to enable more responsive and effective advocacy work.

6.2   Establish the means by which policy and strategy for advocacy is an integrated part of the strategic overview for the Connexional Team.

   i)   As indicated in paragraph 6.1 the Council should approve an advocacy policy which should include:

-    The intended outcomes of advocacy work (changes in behaviour of individuals and groups; change in behaviour of the Connexion, external partners, or government; change in attitudes in society etc.)

-    How advocacy is dealt with, and the criteria to be used when delegating their authority to an advocacy group (see 6c below). How proper attention should be given to advocating the "Priorities for the Methodist Church" within the Connexion and selecting specific issues which relate well to these and to "Our Calling". A commitment to ensuring that specific advocacy work is based on sound research.

-    From time to time Conference may decide to advocate a new specific issue which the Connexion may then adopt and champion for a period of time. The Council should then decide whether to proceed with the issue in accordance with previously agreed policies involving the advocacy group as necessary.

6.3   Establish a small focused advocacy group

   i)   The advocacy staff within the Connexional Team should comprise specialists in advocacy work including campaigning, fundraising and communication.

   ii)   The advocacy staff should have responsibility for:

- developing advocacy policy in relation to internal colleagues and external partners, for approval by Council

- managing the co-ordination of the strategy for advocacy across the Connexional Team.

- creating an appropriate framework for integrating communication and advocacy practice

- liaising with appropriate colleagues, partners and agencies

- advocating all Methodist Church policy and practices and in particular the *Priorities* for The Methodist Church

- develop and coordinate strategies across the Connexion for the raising of funds

- establishing quality standards for advocacy (including research and analysis)

- working with others, to develop a more distinctive Methodist brand.

6.4   A fund-raising policy to be approved by Methodist Council

    i)   The Council should set a general Fundraising Policy which

- *clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the different sections of the Connexional Team*

- includes broad approaches to strategy, especially new approaches like direct mailing or reciprocal mailing

    -    The council works with the advocacy group to identify when fundraising techniques are appropriate or not and for which audiences they might be appropriate.

    ii) That the advocacy group sets an overall fundraising strategy that enables and inspires all sections of the Connexional team to engage in the raising of funds and that allows all members of the Methodist Church (and beyond) to respond financially to support the work of the Church and/or the issues and causes it supports. This strategy would include the setting of fundraising targets for staff employed as fundraisers.

6.5   Clarification of relationships between Methodist Council and partner organisations engaged in advocacy in order to gain synergy and clarity with all parties concerned:

i)   develop the role of Christian Aid as the lead development agency for the Methodist Church

ii)   clarify the relationship between MRDF, The Methodist Council and the Connexional Team.

iii)   sustain and develop partnerships with other agencies as appropriate e.g. NCH, Methodist Homes, etc.

6.6   Consolidation of Funds

The project management group, although mindful that conference has debated the possibilities of combining the funds fairly recently, recommends that this is considered again as part of the work of developing an advocacy strategy.

Improving Communications in the Methodist Church

"The first duty of love is to listen"
Paul Tillich

Overview

How does the mission of the Methodist Church get communicated in the rapidly advancing technological world? How can The Methodist Church best market itself and its message through mediums that are rapidly becoming de rigour for a large percentage of the current population? In current terminology the Methodist Church, as an organisation is a visitor into this world and not an inhabitant.

Is the Methodist Church called to be part of this world? If so, how can the Methodist People best be equipped to meet its priorities, in particular:

To affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church

Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved

What should the Church be doing and what should the Connexional Team be doing to enable this?

1.　Primary Underpinning Recommendation

The Methodist Church should move from a model of communication in which information appears to be forced upon people (often indiscriminately) from the centre [which can be called a "push" function], to one in which people are empowered to find and acquire any information which they need of want [which can be called a "pull" function]. Priority should be given to communications that are informal, horizontal and open to all.

To support this objective, resources need to be transferred:
- from a major emphasis on supporting central functions to one on equipping Circuits and Districts to communicate effectively,
- from paper-based communications to electronic communications,
- from widely and indiscriminately distributed mailings to development and use of a database for targeted application,
- from using traditional techniques and methods to engaging radically and innovatively with new technological advances in communicating that are geared to mission.

2.　Communication and the Priorities for the Methodist Church

2.1　Relationships are not possible without communication: they are created and maintained as people speak and listen to one another in all manner of verbal and non-verbal ways. Communication is the simple exchange of meaning – the giving and receiving of feelings, opinions, ideas, or beliefs. Communication lies at the heart of all interactions'.

2.2　In the beginning, God communicates, gives expression of divine being: *speaks* creation into being. In the *Word* made flesh, God communicates. In creation and in the incarnation, God enables relationships with God and among all creatures, especially human beings.

2.3　The Bible speaks of God who creates relationships. God seeks and maintains relationships with creation, especially with human beings. God seeks to enable and promote relationships within creation, especially among human beings.

2.4　It is of the essence of being Christian to be growing in relationship with God and with other people. It therefore belongs to the nature of the Church that we encourage one another in our relationship with God, that we nurture our relationships with one another and that we seek to enter into new relationships with those around us (in

evangelism and in the pursuit of justice). All of this is only possible by means of communication.

2.5   It is the task of the Church, in every generation, to reflect carefully about which means of communication will most effectively sustain our existing relationships and enable new one to be developed and nurtured.

We have understood this reflection to be the task of our group.

2.6   The language of the priorities are steeped in a wide variety of forms of communication; "Partnership, renew confidence, worship, prayer, supporting community development and action, capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved, fresh ways of being Church, nurturing a culture". Each statement requires some expression of a mode of communication. The Methodist Church can more effectively achieve its priorities with radical change to it communication styles. By recognising and adopting new structures, methods and varied styles of communication dependent on the information and the audience. Effective communication is needed in realising each element of the Priorities.

2.7 Recommendations : Priorities

2.7.1 The Project Management Group (PMG) strongly believes that The Methodist Church must recognise that effective communications are essential to the realisation of Our Calling and the Priorities of the Methodist Church and recommends:

2.7.2 Investment in communications must therefore be seen as mission-critical; consideration should be given not purely to cutting budgets by 30% but to investing in modern communication systems and equipping the church to use them effectively.

2.7.3 Initiatives should be undertaken with urgency to enable and encourage individual churches, Circuits and Districts, The Methodist Conference, the Council and the Connexional Team to identify in what ways they will each improve and develop effective communication methods to support achieving the Priorities.

3. The role of Communication in Church and society

3.1   The ability to communicate is a defining characteristic of humanity. All animals have the ability to identify individuals within their species through visual, aural and tactile communication. In humans this capacity has been developed to such an extent that complex idea, instructions and feats of imagination can be passed from person to person. Language is the key to this sophistication (although communication is about far more than mere words). Initially the spoken word was the dominant mode of communication, but gradually the written word gathered importance particularly after the invention of the printing press. In the last century communications has undergone a further revolution with the advent of electronic communications: telephone, television and computer systems.

3.2   Despite all this diversity and sophistication, at heart there are only two forms of communication: "push" and "pull". In the "push" mode, communications is primarily about seeking to tell, to instruct, to inform and to be understood. In the "pull" mode it is primarily a search to understand, to find out, to learn and to understand. These two modes were probably of roughly equal importance in the days of a dispersed nomadic society, but the more structured society became the greater the emphasis on the "push" mode of communications. A hierarchically structured society gave instructions from the top down. With communication came control, and whether it started with the king or the president, the managing director or the archbishop, virtually all organisations were based on the premise that the important word was the word from the top.

3.3   Only very recently has all this changed. Electronic communications has swept away the need for vertical lines of communications, for hierarchical structures, and for command and control systems. A certain kind of anarchy now rules. Vast reams of information are still pushed out by those in positions of power of knowledge or influence, but people are generally free to choose (or "pull") just what they want from this vast reservoir of information. Arguably the Internet has made the greatest contribution to this revolution giving ubiquitous access to information resources and providing direct any-to-any communication possibilities. But similar revolutions have occurred in other areas. Mobile phones have given a generation of youngsters a means to communicate without any need to involve their parents or guardians; and there is now a virtually unlimited supply of TV and radio available on-demand 24 hours a day.

3.4   Despite these seismic shifts in society, the church still largely operates in the "push" mode of communications. Our Methodist Church structures have remained hierarchical, and communications flows have followed that pattern, largely emanating from the central functions (Conference, Methodist Council and the Connexional Team) outwards or downwards through Districts to Circuits and individual churches. Within the church very little is to be seen of any-to-any communication patterns. For example, a recent survey of Circuit Superintendents found that:

-     Communications with the Connexional Team (CT) is generally effective. 80% of respondents expressed satisfaction with communications from the CT, and 87% were satisfied with the way their enquiries to the CT were handled)

-     Communications between Circuit and District is generally effective. There was a 75% satisfaction with the frequency and 79% satisfaction with the quality of such communication)

-     Communications within and between Circuits could be significantly improved. 46% of Superintendents are dissatisfied with the amount of communication within their Circuits and 31% with the quality of the communication. 65% of superintendents are dissatisfied with amount of communication between neighbouring Circuits and 56% dissatisfied with the quality of that communication.

3.5   It is also notable that vast majority of communications is between ministers and office-bearers in the church. According to Superintendents less than 25% of communications within circuits and no more than 5% of communication between circuits involves ordinary church members. Even allowing for the fact that Superintendents probably do not know of all the informal communication that goes on within and between Circuits, this statistic demonstrates how drastically communication patterns within the Methodist Church are out of step with modern society. If we are to reconnect with society this has to change.

3.6 Recommendations: **Communication Policy**

3.6.1   The Principles of Good Communication set out in the accompanying report should be adopted for the whole Connexion

3.6.2   Ways in which to achieve more 'pull' than 'push' forms of communication (as set out in the report) should be further explored and enacted as appropriate.

3.6.3   Ways in which the Connexion in all its manifestations can improve Church 'body language' (as set out in the report) should be further explored and enacted as appropriate.

3.6.4   A commitment should be made to work towards achieving a specific kite mark in this area e.g. the Crystal Mark.

4.   Church 'Body Language'

4.1 Overview

The PMG has become aware, and has given time and thought to what might be called 'body language'', the messages conveyed by the ways in which people or institutions present themselves physically or practically. It has become convinced that the body language of the church – local and Connexional – is profoundly important in terms of communication, and the fulfilling of *Our Calling* and *Our Priorities.*

4.2 What do we mean?

Just what is meant by 'body language' in this context is not easy to convey briefly, but the following is offered.

4.3   Viccy Cosstick, a catholic laywoman and advisor to the Roman Catholic Bishops of the South of England, speaks passionately about the difference between what is intended to be declared by the Church and what is actually heard and received. She reminds us that the Church has a language, and customs, traditions and practices which are known to a settled, trained constituency, but are impenetrable and even deterring to those 'outside' that community. Similarly Anthony Reddie, a black British theologian talks about traditions bubbling under the surface of a church, rules passed on but never written down. This powerful and defining 'bubbling' narrative is the body language of the church.

4.4   In terms of effective communication it is clear that body language is a major factor. In terms of mission, too, the power and influence of body language is easily underestimated. In an increasingly postChristian context church body language which is positive, authentic and humble is much more effective than, arrogant and haughty body language. Yet, in spite of our protests, the latter is what is 'seen' and 'heard', particularly by those who do not (yet) belong to the (Methodist) church.

4.5   When reduced to proposals the implications of church body language tend to appear to be statements of the obvious, but this should not diminish the deep conviction of the group that how our Church is perceived, in both local and Connexional context, is of enormous importance.

4.6 Values

The PMG set the issue of church body language in the context of consistent values. We are convinced that in every place where the church is visible, audible or otherwise in contact with people – from local to Connexional - a consistent set of values should be expected.

4.7 These values are not necessarily to do with explicit proclamations of faith but with things which repel people away or invite them closer. They have to do with 'mood' as much as 'word'; 'manner' as much as 'action'.

The values we regard as vital include:
- Clarity of communication
- Institutional openness
- Attractive presentation
- Graciousness and signalled interest in people and their issues
- Good standards of maintenance of property.
- Accessibility
- Politeness and courtesy without false deference or servitude
- Hospitableness and an ethos which treats everyone with respect and care (whether they have been in the Church for years or have popped in for a wee and will never be seen again).

4.8 Responses

Whether a Connexional or local building this may mean consciously and deliberately posing - and reacting positively and seriously - to the following questions.

- Is the building in good repair, inside and out?
- Is access for people in wheelchairs and with impairments to vision, hearing etc good and obvious?
- Are notice boards attractive, informative, in good repair and kept up to date?
- Are entrances accessible, welcoming, warm and inviting?
- Are those charged with receiving people, and their inquiries, whether face to face, by telephone or email, trained and genuinely able to present an open, inviting interest, rather than closed 'put-out' disinterest?
- Does the resident community share an ethos that is about genuinely welcoming people, being helpful to them, giving them time? Does their personal body language signal this, or something else?

4.9 Recommendations : Church 'body language'

4.9.1 Reception areas, physically and in terms of personnel, should be recognised as vital places where the body language of the Connexion is first encountered.

4.9.2   The possibility of creating hospitable, friendly meeting place(s) should be explored in which connexional building(s) become more than suites of offices.

4.9.3   An awareness of the power and influence of body language should become a regular part of input and reflection upon all Connexional publications and its website, so that they appear open, inviting, listening, and interested, rather than introverted, with limited access, 'precious', and vain.

4.9.4   A time limited initiative should be undertaken to encourage understanding of the adoption of the key elements of the report in respect of body language throughout the Connexion.

5.   Internal Communication

"More than 50% of communication is listening. 100% of communication is ownership."

5.1 The Connexional Team

Although there are some integrated practices the old Divisional mentality still pervades. Where there is integration it is often brought about by informal relationships, personal initiative, or serendipity.

5.2   The Advocacy project has identified that more synergistic ways of working would improve the functions of advocacy and fundraising. The PMG will recommend integrated approaches to advocacy, campaigning and fundraising.

5.3   There are other integrated approaches that would improve communications, effectiveness and efficiency.

5.4   Policy decisions on streamlining the publications process have brought about some coherence with which most personnel comply. However there are still those choosing to operate outside of the agreed parameters for a variety of reasons including; costs, speed with which publications are achieved, signing off requirements which can hold up or prevent publication, specific design requirements which it is felt cannot be met in house. So there are those who are still outsourcing, undertaking desktop design and producing multiple copies on photocopiers.

5.5 The proposal for a collegiate approach to strategic leadership and senior management will enable a collective, corporate understanding of work themes, current projects and processes. This way of working opens up the potential for more effective communication reducing the possibilities within the Connexional Team of duplication, repetition, overlap and overload.

5.6 **Working Relationship with mph**
The recommendations from Ground Clearing Project(GCP) 7 which focused on the working relationship between mph and the Connexional Team reported to Conference in 2006. A full description is available in the 2006 Conference agenda Volume 2 what follows in 5.8 – 5.18 are some of the salient points in relation to improving communications.

5.7 The PMG recognized a need to create a better discipline and process within the Team over the commissioning and production of materials. It noted that some parts of the Team turn to outside designers, printers or other producers irrespective of both the Design and Production unit in the Communication Office and *mph*. In addition there is also a lot of 'long-run' photocopying, envelope-filling and distribution done at MCH without staff time being properly costed.

5.8 The recommendations of the PMG also provide a single and simple system for commissioning, producing and distributing publications (in the widest sense of the term) which is much more disciplined than the present arrangements.

5.9 It was recommended that a clear and simple agreement (on the lines of a service level agreement) will be produced about the inter-relationship of mph and the Team, to establish that mph and the Team work together as parts of a single organism within a shared accountability to the Conference.

5.10 The recommendations included a series of achievable practical steps which are intended to provide higher quality and greater cost-effectiveness; and which provide a flexible structure that can be further adapted in the light of experience and any recommendations from Project 5 on Communications in the wider Church. These include:

- Creation of a single Design and Production Unit, with a single line of accountability.
- Establishing a single commissioning/permission-giving/editorial/overseeing group for the imprint 'Methodist Publishing House', which would deal with all publications emanating from the Conference, the Connexional Team or other formal parts of the Connexion (e.g. Districts).

- Any proposals for publications from the Conference and the Team would need to demonstrate a vision for the publication and the need for it
- *mph* staff on the group would advise on financial viability/risk of each proposal, then an agreement would be reached that:
  either *mph* sells the product and pays a royalty to the Team;

  or the Team takes all the risk (with the product either being distributed free, or the Team receiving any income from sales minus a service charge);

  or the Team subsidises the selling price in return for a reduced l level of royalty.

5.12   The assumption would be (and an appropriate discipline for it created) that:

- all Conference and Team products come through this route
- design, production, print procurement is by this process
  unless there is an agreement to sub-contract elsewhere
- distribution is through *mph* unless there is an agreement to sub-contract elsewhere.

5.13   As corollaries of the above:

a) the mph Publications Fund (in so far as Connexional Team publications are concerned) would cease;

b) communication between the various editorial groups would ensure that there is a cutting out of duplication, and that neither mph nor the Team produce things without the other knowing of it.

5.14   The relationship and partnership working practices of mph should facilitate improved efficiency and effectiveness in publication development and distribution.

5.15   The effectiveness, efficiency, quality and standards of publications and the practice involved in producing them would benefit from a clear policy to be agreed by Council, possibly as a section within a wider Communications Policy. In the past a Publication Group undertook some of this work. The purpose of the Group was to provide a strategic overview within the Team of key publications issues.

5.16   The group had no formal authority over individual proposals. It sought to influence decision-making by maintaining an overview of all planned publications. In the light of that, it made considered comments on individual proposals and publishing policy and procedures in general

5.17   The place, role and structure of what was the Publication Group will need reviewing in the light of the developments and recommendations that emerge from the work of this Project Management Group.

5.18 Given the new vision for this area a different form of managing the work needs to be created. Consideration will need to be taken to ensure the most appropriate structures and systems are put in place to ensure effective and efficient production of publications.

5.19 A small dedicated specialist communications section needs to be established within the Team, and linked to the commissioning and oversight body for the work of mph described above.

5.20 It would contribute to the development of the overall policy to be agreed by the Methodist Council. It would have responsibility for developing a comprehensive communications strategy in response to the overarching policy, uniting and consolidating all forms and practices in respect of communication throughout the Team.

5.21 They would need to consider effective and efficient ways of making links, conduits, relationships, and partnerships internally and externally (including with the 'Methodist Publishing House' group mentioned above). It would be important to ensure open access to this section and that their work was also transparent and accessible.

5.22 Recommendations: Connexional Team Communications

5.22.1 A small dedicated Communications Team should be established that includes media, web design, publications and marketing.

This team should be responsible for:

- managing the co-ordination of the strategy for communication across the Connnexional Team, developing integrated systems and establishing internal services such as proof reading
- establishing standards of practice for all forms of communication
- working closely with those responsible for advocacy
- working closely with the web writer
- establishing a user group
- ensuring appropriate advice it sought on protocols, legal requirements, data protection, subject access etc.

5.22.2 Appropriate structures and systems should be put in place to ensure effective and efficient production of publications.

5.22.3 As a model of good practice an accessible digest of the outcomes of Project 7 on the development of the working

relationship between mph and the Connexional Team should be created. This should be made available for all those within the Team and elsewhere for whom knowledge of the outcomes is essential.

6.   Informal Internal Communications

One of the key areas for attention is informal communication. Serious consideration of the essential elements that go towards creating and maintaining an appropriate ethos for a Christian organisation is needed. Developing a true sense of team, collaborative collegial ways of working, genuinely and demonstrably valuing and nurturing individual employees all have beneficial repercussions to efficient and effective working practices and are essential in aiming to wards creating a 'beacon of excellence'.

6.1   As far as the Connexional Team in concerned, lack of attractive informal places to meet within Methodist Church House decreases the opportunity of people to meet and develop relationships and a sense of community and team. The immediate benefits for team cohesion and morale would be enormous. The knock on effect of people recognising that there are other colleagues working in associated fields with whom it would be helpful to communicate would also be enhanced. It would make a contribution to the current out of sight out of mind way of functioning. It could also ameliorate the hierarchical nature of internal relationships.

6.2   As part of the work with Staff on Team Focus a corporate blog for the Connexional Team is planned. It will be a trial up until Conference 07 and then reviewed to see what kind of use has been made of it. Currently few make any use of the intranet facility. Further work needs to be undertaken on imaginative and creative ways of making intranet usage attractive. In addition to encouraging people to understand what the advantages are of having a user friendly and well used intranet.

6.3   Despite the move to open plan offices the silo nature of working within the Connexional Team still exists. For some the only time, which they venture forth from their own floor, is when they are required to attend a monthly team development session. Work needs to be undertaken throughout the whole team on changing these practices. They have a detrimental effect on people's morale, personal valuing and self-esteem but also on work practices. This style of existence does not encourage true team practices in work areas. Lateral, joined up thinking and making connections across sections, themes and areas of work currently does not come naturally at present. If the future Connexional Team is to be a beacon of excellence the ways in which people communicate with each other, formally and informally, need to radically improve.

6.4   Please refer to some of the thinking and work suggested in the section Church and 'body language' which needs to be applied within the Connexional Team.

6.5   Given the likelihood in the immediate future for a mutually beneficial sharing of the building with the URC and potential for future need to extend space to others it is essential to consider how best to facilitate the building of relationships formally and informally.

6.6   There will inevitably be a number of factors to consider in relation to use of space in the building and of course ultimately with the approval of the building's trustees. Some of the major factors are:
-       the Connexional Team is to be much smaller for a number of reasons,
-       there are outstanding questions to resolved about how many staff are needed to enable particular functions, where the size of the function has not yet been determined,
-       it may be possible to develop a number of joint service operations with the URC and other partners.
-       some of the repercussions of how certain functions will be under taken in the future may reduce the need for holding particular spaces within the building,
-       currently accommodation is very generous in many areas of the building.

6.7   What is vital is an exciting vision. This then needs to be accompanied by a massive culture change, through positive leadership, effective management and valued and committed people.

6.8   There are a number of physical issues regarding access and some regarding web use, relating to equalities and diversity that need to be addressed within the Connexional Team and their associated offices. Further thinking is outlined in section 19 on equalities and diversity.

6.9   The principles that should underpin future communication in the Team are:
•   openness and transparency
•   being clear, concise and accessible
•   genuinely valuing individuals
•   ensuring that over 50% of communication is 'listening'
•   gaining full ownership of the communication processes
•   recognising diverse needs
•   promoting equality and diversity
•   using a mixed media approach
•   attending to appropriate timing of communication
•   enabling and being open to critical reflection and feedback
•   providing accessible feedback mechanisms
•   maintaining agreed delivery and response times
•   producing high quality materials, whatever the medium or method
•   using existing gifts and talents
•   underpinning all communication with God centred worship and prayer

6.10 Recommendations: Connexional Team Internal Communications

6.10.1 The PMG recommends establishing ways in which members of Connexional Team can be encouraged and enabled to interact with each other, both formally and informally. The group consider that this would be enabled and facilitated by serious consideration and action on the following:

- the value and desirability of a single 'return point'/node [e.g. a single building] to bring together members of the Team who are based in offices or working in a dispersed fashion
- the need for the reception area to be recognised as a vital place where the body language of the Methodist Church is first encountered, and for this to be developed both physically and in terms of personnel
- the adoption of Principles of Good Practice

6.10.2 A project should be conducted to find new ways of working that enhance informal communications among the Team. This should include the creation of welcoming, accessible space(s) for informal meetings of Team members, in recognition of the importance of face-to-face contact for good Team relationships and working and so that the building becomes more than suites of offices and the inhabitants more of a team and a community.

6.10.3 To enable effective communications systems the Connexional Team must:
- Explain the systems (such as the intranet), so that staff see the benefits and want to use them
- Empower the staff so that they have the tools to use them effectively.

7. Connexional Team In Support of the Connexion

"Just because your are speaking in my direction doesn't mean you are communicating with me."
David Gordon

7.1 Overview

The Connexional Team exists to support the mission of the British Methodist Church in the outworking of the priorities. It currently consists of 140 people working in sections.

7.2 Current Situation

Each section successfully communicates with its individual constituency. World Church office will communicate with those with a particular interest. MAYC with theirs etc. There is one form of central communication available to all the sections, the Link Mailing where the sections offer (at their choice) materials which are compiled into 2 editions across the year. The developing website gives more open door access into areas across the board so people can potentially explore a number of themes/networks. Some sections have or are developing websites. The Methodistchildren website was launched this year. Some sections have there own publications e.g. Women's Network produces Magnet.

7.3   Direct contact for those who are in the know, understand the structures or know either the title of an office holder or the actual name getting information is possible. Those inside the church but outside these parameters find it harder to make contact.

7.4   It would appear that there is more understanding of what individual sections of the Connexional Team are engaged with but far less understanding about the overarching strategic rationale, thinking and planning. People know what the most recent JMA (Junior Mission for All) project is but don't really understand what the Connexional Team does or could do for them.

7.5   There are also concerns about duplication, response times, keeping people adequately informed, meeting deadlines, timing (in terms of receiving things well in advance to be able to respond appropriately) updating of information and a general lack of confidence that the Connexional Team has any real understanding about the issues and culture of district, circuit and local church.

7.6   The recent survey undertaken by the PMG with Superintendent ministers revealed the following usage of the Connexional Team. Of the 162 who responded: 49% described their contact with the team good.
>   86% of superintendents had contacted the team. 32% contacted them quarterly. 85% contact the team for specialist information. 73% used the phone. 65% use a name from the minutes.
>
>   In addition 56% gave comments on how communications from the Connexional Team could be improved, these included:
- More targeted and co–coordinated communication.
- People want to understand and be kept informed of the Connexional Team's thinking

- More use of electronic communication but this should not be in the form of scattergun emails rather an officer holder's webpage should be
  set up though which the Team can communicate.
- Frustration was expressed at being used as Connexion postpeople

7.7 The figures from the research undertaken and the practice of a number of staff mean that considerable time is given to responding to direct calls. This causes staff to be draw off primary tasks on a regular basis. It also perpetuates a dependency culture when there is expertise available at a more locally. The media office do provide a service and the website is developing its most frequently answered questions (FAQ) section. However people like to be able to talk to a real person and someone who responds confidently. When the Methodist Council was recently told about the possibilities of a help desk the response was affirming but clear in asking for a person to be at the other end of the telephone and not a series of electronic options.

7.8 The creation of a Methodist Church enquiries service including a help desk could be beneficial in a number of ways. This could be delivered with a dispersed structure. It could be beneficial through providing a quality information service for church needs enabling the Team to prioritise other proactive work, and act as a gateway to signpost enquirers to appropriate sources, including local ones. Such a service can ensure that enquirers are given an adequate appropriate response. However, the creation of a help desk should not produce a 'road-block' to helpful direct communication which builds relationships.

7.9 Identifying a 'duty officer' would also be beneficial. A senior leader or manager to be available (using a rota system) on call, to offer support for the various issues that arise on a daily basis which would be made known the Team, reception, communications office and the help desk.

7.10   Recommendations: Connexional Team Communicating with the Connexion

7.10.1   A Methodist Enquiry Service and help desk should be created.

7.10.2   Ways should be found of achieving greater targeting of mailings to specific constituencies. This needs to be done with close reference to the quality and content of the Connexional database.

7.10.3   Establish the role and appropriate system for providing a
          'duty officer'.

8.   Communication across the Connexion

8.1 Overview

Connexionalism is a gift that Methodism brings to the universal church.
It is a living out of the concept that we are the Body of Christ -
connected organically. If one part suffers, all share in that suffering
and, likewise, if one part receives honour then the whole receives
honour.

8.1.2   Through shared resources (human and material), our mission is more
        effective, our message clearer and our love better displayed to a world
        that cries out for healing.

8.1.3   Connexionalism finds expression through shared oversight and
        devolved power. The local matters as much as the national and the
        global and each part of the body is able to contribute to the health of
        the whole.

8.1.4   Communication within the body is essential - whilst different parts
        have different roles and identities, the whole has to be driven by
        common understanding. For British Methodism at the moment that
        common understanding is expressed in Our Calling and the Priorities.
        The challenge is to develop or maintain a complex network of effective
        communication that helps us to embody these things in our mission
        activity and in our worship.

8.1.5   Using information arising from a piece of research undertaken with
        superintendent ministers the following analysis and observations are
        made.

8.2 Communication within circuits

Communication *within* circuits were described as patchy (39%). 36%
described the quality of communications between the churches in their
circuit as satisfactory. Persons most involved in circuit level
communications were minister to minister (60%) and minister to staff
(40%). The main method of communication was email (65%) closely
followed by verbal, newsletters and committees.

8.2.1   The suggested improvements which were identified that could be made
        to circuit communication were:
        • Churches need to make more use of the circuit office and circuit
          administrator.

- Information needs to be targeted at the interested end user. The intended recipients name or department should be clearly stated.
- All churches should have access to Internet and email. However, email use must be constant. Email circulation lists and Circuit directories should be available to every church and should include lay workers.
- Websites need to be created or improved and their use encouraged.
- Circuit diaries and events need co-ordinating
- People need to be encouraged to take an interest in events outside their own church

8.3 Communication between circuits

The amount of inter circuit communication was described as patchy (36%). The quality was also rated patchy (25%). 76% said superintendents were most involved in communication. The methods used for communicating were 61% email 50% verbal (face to face or phone) and 40% by letter.

8.3.1 The suggested improvements on how communications between circuits could be improved were:
- Boundaries are a problem. Circuit boundaries need to be more porous.
- Co-ordination and *timely* information sharing should be encouraged. E.g. consultation over major and cross circuit events.
- More regular meetings were mentioned, however, this communication *must* be linked to common interests
- Finding ways to reduce the amount of information which is felt to be too much from too many sources

8.4 Communication between District and Circuit

Communications between the district and circuit were agreed by 43% to be about right. The quality deemed satisfactory by 47%. Communications from chair to superintendent were the most popular (78%). Followed by Superintendent to chair (64%) and district officers to superintendent (62%).The main methods of communication are email (85%).

8.4.1 The suggested recommendations on how communications between circuit and district could be improved were:
- Finding a way to reduce information overload and duplication of the same information from different sources.
- Improve websites. E.g. chair superintendent email groups
- Target material to the relevant end-user

8.4.2 One general observation is the amount of communication that is taking place between presbyters, who make up a very small percentage of the total number of potential of people who could be involved in the communications loops. It is unclear at this stage how much involvement of other officer holders would contribute to reducing the

overload that all are feeling. Consideration needs to be taken on how to achieve a more even spread.

8.5 Recommendations
Communication across the Connexion

The PMG recognises that reliance on a centralised system for distributing information within the church needs to be overcome and recommends the following:

8.5.1   A commitment should be made to reducing catch-all centralised mailings, developing more effective systems for selective mailings, and providing a system by which information can be accessed upon request.

8.5.2   The role of the Circuit should be strengthened as the principal organisational unit within the Methodist Church.

8.5.3   Communications within and between Circuits should be enabled through the development and use of a comprehensive church member database.

8.5.4   Where needed Circuits (and Districts) should be encouraged to seek help, training and support in the development of linked websites.

8.5.5   All Districts should appoint a Communications Support person to provide advice and support to Circuits and churches.

9.   Communication between Conference and the Connexion

9.1 Overview

A key structure and therefore process in the communication system is that of the Methodist Conference. It is essential 'to achieve a dynamic process of communication between the Church and the Conference'. This process needs to be accessible, inclusive, effective, and efficient.

9.2   Current Situation

9.3   Conference Methods of Working

The Conference Review Group(CRG) recommended that a Conference web-site and other facilities should be set up to provide facilities for members of the Conference to discuss items of business and other matters of concern with each other in advance of the Conference, and then provide material to help representatives disseminate the news

and thinking of the Conference after it has met. The web-site would be available to them for the six months prior to the Conference concerned and the six months after it.

9.4 The CRG believes that greater and more imaginative use needs to be made of the provision in Standing Orders for much of the business to be conducted as conversations rather than as forensic or parliamentary debates. Where debates are held with a view to making detailed decisions, they should be set up, presented and guided in such a way as to enable them to do so effectively (but without infringing the rights of members of the Conference to respond to the subject under consideration as they see fit).

9.5 In order to increase the potential for Christian Conferring the Review Group recommended that the members of the Conference should meet in concurrent Workshop Groups to engage in the mutual exploration and open-ended discernment of matters for which there is no report or set of resolutions in the formal agenda.

9.6 Resources and facilitators would be provided for the workshops, and members of the Conference would be asked to select which they wished to attend. Brief summaries of the discussions would be put up on display boards or made available electronically. The Business Committee should be asked to review the outcomes of the Workshops at a meeting after the Conference and, where appropriate, to recommend to the following Conference or the Methodist Council what further action should be taken. The recommendations of the Business Committee should be made available to Conference members through the web-site and in other ways.

9.7 The CRG also recommended that a process of holding preliminary "Hearings" should be established where there can be a preliminary dialogue about items of business which are the subject of a report or set of resolutions in the formal business due to be taken later in the same Conference.

9.8 Hearings would provide a forum in which an item of business or report could be presented to the members of the Conference and they could raise points of information or for clarification with those responsible for producing it. This would remove the need for these things to be dealt with in the formal debate on the matter concerned later in the Conference, and enable that debate to be more focussed on matters of principle and on the major decisions. A number of hearings on separate topics could be held concurrently. Districts and other bodies should encourage their representatives, where appropriate, to ensure that they attend as many as possible between them.

9.9 For some other items of business, such as matters of routine governance and detailed decision-making, the Conference should divide into concurrent Reference Groups

9.10 The CRG has been asked to continue its work.

9.11 The broadcasting of Conference so those who were unable to attend could listen in was greatly appreciated and should be developed and repeated.

9.12 When a subject like Time to talk of God or The Nature of Oversight is identified as a priority from Conference there is then both a need and

an expectation that it will then be communicated widely across the Connexion. For outcomes like Time to Talk of God and others there needs to be a streamlined way in which prompt strategic and operational responses can be put into action, including clarity around roles and responsibilities and practice requirements. Some solutions need to be identified re the communication patterns within the Connexional Team and in relation to mph.

9.13   It also might be helpful, as good practice, to ensure that when a policy document is brought to Conference, materials are in place, ready to use. This would inform the Connexion either of ongoing progress, or of the final agreed details of a policy and how it might best be applied in District, Circuit or local Church.

9.14   The example of Time to Talk of God gives a good model of practice for achieving an accessible practical document in a timely fashion following a Conference agreement. This requires advance planning and preparation alongside professional communications skills in writing, design, publication, and marketing. Fundamental to this approach is for those preparing reports to really understand the context and audience for which the material is aimed.

9.15   The key things learnt form the Time to Talk of God analysis were:
- appropriate group process for a committee developing content
- a project plan which has sufficient time and space for all the elements of the process
- professional production of an accessible readable product
- style coherent with its argument
- standards are those of intelligent journalism rather than academic discourse.
- publication is designed in a contemporary way visually appealing and the way it handles is good and non-threatening magazine style format rather than unbroken text
- researching and piloting the material well in advance
- ensuring that well within the timescale all the key stakeholders and committees have been involved in the process
- huge benefits of presenting at the ministerial session
- high quality presentation and presentation materials at Conference and for use in Districts and Circuits
- effective use of all marketing opportunities information flyer, Methodist Recorder, Link mailing
- accessible format for those who are to use it
- sensibly priced

9.16   Recommendations: Communications from Conference

9.16.1   The Conference Review Group should be encouraged to continue to develop radical and innovative ways of improving

the experience and communication of, to and from Conference.

9.16.2   Methodist Council and Conference should agree that reports which are of interest to the whole Church or of sufficient import, should be produced in formats best suited to engage people and facilitate local reception and reflection.

9.16.3   The production values and success of Time to talk of God report be used as a benchmark for quality and effectiveness of such reports.

9.16.4   A commitment should be made to thorough preparation of material prior to Conference, and post-Conference production and publication of material should be undertaken with alacrity as a matter of good practice.

9.16.5   Improvements in communication practices at Conference should be continued and regularly reviewed to ensure further innovations.

9.16.6   The initiative of broadcasting Conference should be continued and developed further.

10. Electronic communications

10.1 Current situation

The Methodist Church currently relies primarily on paper-based communications. This system:

- assumes a communications paradigm that is hierarchical: communications are assumed to be either up or down key people from Church to Circuit to District to Connexion
- relies on specific people to collect and disseminate information within each layer of this hierarchical model
- results in significant wastage and ineffective communications, as material often fails to reach the relevant people
- creates significant pressures on key people in Districts, most particularly Circuit Superintendents.

10.2   The chain of communication model is increasingly out of touch with the reality of modern-day communications.   Most organisations now operate much more distributed communications networks, and most people are now familiar with these systems, particularly through use of email and the Internet. Distributed networks allow any-to-any communications, and provide for both "push" and "pull"

applications: i.e. information can either be pushed out to specific people to whom it is known to be of interest, or placed on a central locations (typically a website) from which those who wish it can obtain (or pull down) the information.

10.3   Distributed communications networks rely primarily on electronic communications. Only by these means does the wide distribution of information become possible and cost-effective.

10.4   Throughout the Connexion members of the Methodist Church are to a greater or lesser extent adapting to this electronic communications model. It is for example, commonplace now to have email addresses on the Circuit Preaching Plan and to have that Plan available on the Internet. Many churches also have their own websites.

10.5   However, there is no consistency in the adoption of electronic communications even among the employees of the Church. This means that the Church has had to continue to rely on paper-based and chains of communication approach.

10.6   The time has come for this to change. A common policy and consistent implementation of electronic communications is needed, both to fulfil the Priorities and to achieve cost-effective communications throughout the Church.

The key areas for investment will be:
10.7   Developing a comprehensive database of all employees, office-holders and interested parties within the Church to be used as the basis for all electronic communications. This database will need to contain appropriate and sufficient fields to meet a variety of growing needs, potentially including basic details, email addresses, church, circuit, positions held, areas of interest, publications subscribed to, (and probably others). It will be essential to adhere to normal protocols and data protection requirements.

10.8   Continued development of the Methodist Church website to make it easier to use, providing more information and in more and varied ways (e.g. blogs and podcasts), providing links to member church websites, and providing contact details for key staff.

10.9   Develop and strengthen the relationship between the website and the database with all appropriate safeguards and protocols.

10.10 Providing training in the use of electronic communications throughout the Connexion to
-    those who deliver communication on behalf of the Team
-    the wider Connexional Team in terms of using the Information Communication Technologies to the best that they can be

>   -   those across the Connexion who need to be able to use specific programmes

Consideration needs to be given to the existing regional training mechanisms and personnel to support these initiatives.

10.11   With imminent changes to the Connexional team and the subsequent ramifications it is reasonable to anticipate that there will be a general reduction in the overall costs of producing paper publications. The Communications Ground Clearing Project Team estimates that with the change in patterns of working and the investments suggested it will be possible actually to **reduce** total expenditure on communications within the Connexion by 30% over the same period.

10.12 Whilst the PMG encourages the development of electronic communications direct face to face communication is essential to ensure the outworking of incarnational theology, enculturation, and authentic communication.

10.11   Recommendations: Electronic Communications

10.11.1   The Methodist Council *(Church? Conference?)* should agree an Electronic Communications Policy.

10.11.2   The Methodist Church should recognise that electronic communication is the most effective and efficient form of communication in the 21st Century, both for internal and for external usage.

10.12.3   The Methodist Church should affirm its intention to make electronic communication the primary means of communication, to be used whenever and wherever it is possible.

10.12.4   As a matter of policy, the Church should prioritise and encourage the use of electronic communications.

10.12.5   Commensurate with this policy, the Church should invest £X in electronic communications over the period 2007-2010.

10.12.6   The Methodist Church should also recognise that for some of its members, electronic communications are not and, for the foreseeable future, will not be possible. It should therefore support the provision of paper copies of material on an "as needed" or "when requested" basis. Similarly the Church should , wherever possible, take account of special needs (e.g. the provision of large print or Braille material).

10.12.7 There should be close scrutiny of expenditure on communications. The development of oversight, management and monitoring of the central communications budget should be strongly encouraged. At the same time the anticipated cost benefits of investing in electronic communications should be made readily available.

10.12.8 All employees and office holders in the Church should be required to sign a declaration accepting the Church's electronic communications naming convention, and agreeing to have their contact details included within the Methodist Church contacts database.

11. Towards a Connexional Database

11.1 Overview

A comprehensive bespoke database is an essential underpinning tool to effective communication for a 21st century organisation. It can equip numerous people for the roles and tasks they are required to undertake. It can link people with problems to solve and interests to share. It can enable advocacy, marketing and fundraising. It is an invaluable tool which those who have yet to discover its potential need to be encouraged to understand and nurture.

11.2 Significant inroads have already taken place into the creation of a Connexional database. It will need to grow depending on demand. It will certainly needs to link with everything on the website.

11.3 Key people need direct (via the Web) access to a very simple process of changing addresses or creating new contacts as they take on certain posts. It will be easier to persuade them to do that if there is some benefit. For example there is an awareness of how difficult some Districts and Circuits find it to produce an annual Directory. It would be possible for them to access a simple tool that would produce a Directory for their circuit or district for them, using the data they have updated for the Connexional database.

11.4 The Team would be able to use the data for 'business' purposes and could even form links of some sort with entities such as MHA, mph, NCH, Methodist Insurance under carefully drafted user agreements. In this way, and only in this way, does notice to any part of the church organisation about new addresses or deaths etc, become notice to the whole organisation.

11.5 Limited areas within the database could be made available to different groups. It would be possible to give Chairs access to church statistics and other data as they need it. It would be possible for example to

enable a District Property Secretary in Cumbria to contact opposite numbers in other Districts. A circuit property steward could ask other property stewards Does anyone in E Lancs know a good plumber?

11.6 There are lots of issues to resolve such as standard titles for posts, at least on the database, data protection issues etc, but they are all possible and not necessarily expensive.

11.7 The church must start with the widest vision possible, and then regularly challenge itself to achieve it.

12. Current Situation

12.1 The Connexional Database currently contains 46,656 individuals. It has email addresses for 7,146 of those. The web site already has links, for example, to member church websites together with various other bits of information.

12.2 The Connexional Team collects a vast amount of data, much of it many times over (e.g. numbers of churches, ministers, worshippers etc are replicated in Statistics for Mission and grant forms etc).

12.3 Neither the Team not other parts of the Connexion analyses properly the information that it possess or collects [even though the Team pays for the services of highly professional Church of England staff to analyse the data it does not tell them what questions it wants answering]. Much of the information collected it (e.g. Schedules) is simply filed.

12.4 As the Team moves to being "project-oriented" there is a danger that it will set up new "sampling" style research projects from which it will extrapolate results - and in the process collect again data that it already possesses.

12.5 There is a tendency for the various parts of the Team to have a parochial or privatised view of knowledge and information that reflects a "silo" mentality rather than a Connexional one. Data is as a private possession rather than as something held in common (but with all the proper safguards of data protection established). Knowledge is therefore seen as the possession of information/data for discrete purposes in which the knower has exclusive power, rather than as something shared in interactive and interdependent relationships.

12.6 Therefore we have to ensure that when people communicate information to one part of the connexion, the purposes for which it is collected and may be used are known.

12.7 Within those parameters steps must be taken to ensure that when people give information to the Connexion they need only give it once (i.e. when it is given to one part of the Connexion the other parts know it). This means that Connexional databases need to be connected and all information needs to be in electronic format.

12.8 The Team and other parts of the Coonexion need to analyse the information that they possess or collect in a way that helps mission strategy. We need to stop collecting most of the data we currently collect which we don't use and cannot envisage using. We also need to stop people researching things where we already have the information. This may mean not collecting all the statistics annually. But at times we may ask for more detail e.g. the Churches are beginning to talk about what information we shall collect as Churches at the time of the 2 011 Census [e.g. so we can compare number of registered disabled in congregations compared to registered disabled in society etc.]

12.9 The Freedom of Information Act may lead to people asking the Methodist Church about statistics to do with, for example, the gender mix of ministers, the proportion of BME members of the Church etc. The database needs to be designed with such questions built in, for fair and easy retrieval of data

13. Current work in progress

13.1 Providing details on the web site for key staff is something currently being worked on. There are, however, very clear Data Protection Act issues.

13.2 The production of a suitable Data Protection Policy covering the management and use of data within the connexion is also underway with a draft currently available.

13.3 In the New Year a user group for representatives from all the employees at Methodist Church House and possibly Manchester as well will be set up.

13.4 Production of a "Version 2" of the Connexional Database, and associated applications, is under way and will be rolled out in a similar timescale. This new version hopefully addresses a lot of the "usage" issues that were previously the case.

13.5 By the middle of next year the new "Suite" of applications should be in use by all groups within MCH. It will enable them to email people directly, either individually or as part of a distribution list according to the role or roles they have within the church.

13.6 Work is being undertaken with Chapel Studios in using the website to both publish data about churches and being able to "distribute" forms, in particular Circuit and Church Profiles, for people to fill in online, rather than by exchange of paper mail.

13.7 Database consultant, John Ream, is looking into ways in which we can link parts of the Connexional Database (offline, held at MCH) and databases on the website (for example, the list of church names,

addresses and websites used in the Church Search facility on
www.methodist.org.uk)

13.8 At present these are not linked up at all, so if one is updated, the other needs someone keying in the data, it doesn't happen automatically.

13.9 Initial conversations with Chapel Studios have taken place. It was agreed that, Chapel and appropriate team members, would look into ways that the on and offline databases could be linked. As an initial project in this direction, a way to automatically update the Church address/website databases automatically is being sought.

13.10 After an initial pilot it is anticipated that by the end of next year much more of the Connexional Database will be online.

13.11 The intention is to facilitate using records of peoples e-mails to target communications from the Methodist Church. This doesn't happen at present. Work will be done in finding ways for people to opt in to receiving news/communications when they submit their details for the database.

13.12 In addition thinking is going into determining how to set up at the 'front end' a means by which the data base could be provided to an end user with a security code. Supplied with a computer application to enable the creation of directories for District, Circuit and churches. Back loading the database on line in a quid pro quo arrangement.

13.13 The potential for use of office holders is vast. Treasurers, property stewards, all have good reason to seek advice and help from others in like office. A system enabling secure access to data would build networks, share information, develop community and release the Connexional Team from some of the mundane but essential queries. There are also potential for supporting Church and Circuit reviews.

13.14 In addition instead of arbitrarily sending everyone resources irrespective of need there could be a process to enable selective downloading.

13.15 Ultimately enabling the wider Connexion will be able to interact with the database, possibly down to individual members.

13.16 The aim is to service the Connexional community trying to serve through 'pull' rather than 'push'.

14. Recommendations:Database

A comprehensive database of Methodist Church office bearers, members and adherents is critical to the future of the church. The aim should be to have all members (and adherents) on such a database by 2010.

The current "silo" mentality of separate databases needs to be pulled down and replaced with a more inter-dependent and mutually supportive model.

14.1 The vision for the database and its potential use should be shared more widely across the Team in particular with those working in communications, marketing and advocacy.

14.2 Work should continue on developing a properly managed and resourced project to create a single Connexional database.

14.3 Processes for accessing, keying-in, interrogating and analysing data should be kept as accessible as possible.

14.4 Ways should be found of ensuring that when people are asked to communicate information to one part of the connexion, the purposes for which it is collected and may be used are known.

14.5 Data should be collected and analysed that will best serve the mission of the church.

14.6 A system should be developed of enabling secure access to data which build networks, share information, develop community and release the Connexional Team from some of the mundane but essential queries with which it currently deals.

15. External Communications

15.1 Overview

15.2 Laptops connect to the Internet without wires; mobile phones can now receive photos and files. You can now learn through your mobile (m-learning) uploading material such as Theory Mobile a service which allows you revise and test your driving theory. We have 24hr emails, cordless phones, digital cameras, camcorders, Ipods, MP3 players, PDAs (personal digital assistant), affordable video cameras, podcasts are easily achieved with home recorded audi files published on line.

15.2 The internet provides an overwhelming range of services, opportunities and virtual experiences. On line everything from shopping to gambling, advice sites, research facilities, chats rooms, blogs, virtual games, virtual worlds like Second Life can have 14k people and more engaged at one time from across the world.

15.3 MSN and like chat facilities abound for those natural internet users enabling online conversation (with it own txt slang: ave a lk l8r @ de appendix) through the net with seemingly unlimited numbers of people

who can be invited in to contribute in the conversation at any one time. It can also include computer-to-computer video/phone calls

15.4 In contrast we have the current external communications methods of the Methodist Church. The Methodist Recorder(independently controlled), media officers in a growing number of districts, a Connexional Media Officer who along with others is successful in getting coverage. We have made some innovations and ventured in to podcasting, video-conferencing, text messaging, web forums, e-news through emails and the Buzz. The Methodist Church is a major sponsor of St Pixels. However most of this is still for use internally and not for external purposes. There have been some recent initiatives. The online labyrinth is one example of a communication resource deliberately designed to be for external use.

15.5 The question remains how do we bridge the gap into the fast developing world outlined above? How do we capitalise and build on the massive demand for popular spirituality, seeing it as an opportunity rather than a threat? How do we take our core message into new places through new media? How do we find innovative radical ways in which to place new ways of being church in a rapidly emerging alien context?

16. Website

16.1 Current Situation

Methodist Website (www.methodist.org.uk) usage is growing. Based on the same period last year (Sept – October 2006) traffic is up 43%. Average requests (hits) for pages per day are 3,789; there are an average of 1,234 visitors per day; and the average number of pages visited is 3.07.

There has been recognition that it needs updating and there is a group currently working on its redevelopment. The current focus is for use by Methodist people and to meet the needs of the Methodist Church. Some serious consideration needs to be undertaken to ensure that the website is accessible and meaningful to those outside the Church. It should be possible as a newcomer to Methodism through the website to gain an understanding of the Methodist Church's mission and it unique charisms.

16.2 There have been a number of new initiatives in the last year. Podcasting a 'radio' talk show – 20 minutes or so in length produced once a month.

16.3 People with RSS get automatic updates of MC news stories (or 'What's New' items from the homepage, or audio features) to

their desktop. Local church websites can also include automatically updating headlines and links to MC news stories.

16.4 As a follow up to the ICT project a new website is under development where people can submit and share resources they have produced themselves with others (e.g. Circuit Plan software, PowerPoint files for worship).

16.5 Four websites were developed Anglican-Methodist Covenant, Methodist Anniversaries 2007, Pray Without Ceasing and Methodistchildren. Four bulleting boards have started in the last few months; Pray without Ceasing, The Interface, Methodist Children Children's, and Children's Workers'

16.6 E-News and The Buzz. Currently has 3,400 subscribed and growing steadily – up about 1000 in the last year. E-News goes out around 15th of each month, The Buzz around the 1st of each month. These are further distributed by being forwarded on, printed out and put on noticeboards, used in church magazines, posted on church websites etc. There are no figures for how much this happens. The latest versions are also available on the website through a constant link, so church websites can always link to the latest version.

17.1 Future Web development

Future ideas include: a 'Methodist blog', with a handful of appointed contributors to reflect and comment on news and developments in the world at large from a Christian/Methodist standpoint.

17.2 Update of 'Introduction to Methodism' pages on website. These can be used better to promote Methodism to the world at large - esp. younger people, who may know only the clichés (anti-alcohol, straightlaced, etc…) without realising those aspects of Methodism that might appeal (social justice, campaigning,).

17.3 'I Need Help' section, what might people need help with that we can provide that we don't at the moment? – Section on crisis, loneliness, pain: advice, possible links to prayer bulletin board, links to other organisations.

17.4 Contribution to reducing the 'Call Centre' aspect of the Team's work by upgrading the Frequently Asked Questions area on website, bringing together of all current and new resources that deal with frequent enquiries.

17.5 Information Technology Equalities and Diversity

Despite all the developments the current website is a not good for dyslexic people, people with (some) visual impairments and people with poor IT–literacy. Some indication in the website

policy to how best to meet the requirements of equalities and diversity would be desirable. For instance in the images section, to ensure that all images used reflect the Methodist Church's stance on equalities and diversity.

17.6 It is noted that the new website development group has a member who has expertise in this area and is able to advise on access issues. She is making careful and helpful recommendations to tackle these issues.

18. Recommendations: Website

18.1 Work on updating the website should be continued.

18.2 A network should be established for the Methodist Church on the lines of MSN.

18.3 Funding should be provided for an exploratory project to explore the potential of virtual sites as a form of mission, providing a new way of being church in the virtual existences that are inhabited by many who do not come into contact with the Methodist Church. The PMG urges that the aim of engaging with the missing generation can be facilitated this way. This could be done by taking up residence in an established virtual site such as Second Life.

18.4 A 'my prayer space' virtual existence (akin to the Habbo site) should be created where people can design their own space for prayer and interact with 'gifts'.

18.5 Consideration should be given as to how best to meet equalities and diversity needs.

18.6 The website policy should be updated in the light of this report and its recommendations and circulated widely.

19. Media

19.1 The Media Service issues about 90 press releases annually. It responds to about 10 enquiries from members of the public per week. The service tracks each of the UK's major national newspapers daily, and sends clippings as requested to the Connexional Team.

They also produce a monthly podcast and enable an average of one radio interview per week from the Methodist Church House in-house

studio. During Conference, two studios were set up for the first time in 2005, facilitating over 30 interviews during Conference.

The Media Relations Office deals with an average of one highly sensitive matter per month.

By necessity the office liaises regularly with senior Team members.

They also support and train a network of volunteer District Communications Officers.

The media service is available out of hours via mobile phone and wireless Internet technology and has dealt with news desks on national newspaper as late as 11:50 at night.

19.2   New initiatives in 2005

19.2.1   Podcast – launched in August, the Methodist Church became the first major denomination in Britain to have a podcast (a short radio show available via the Internet).

19.2.2   Two studios were set up at Methodist Conference. Previously the media office have offered one radio studio from Conference, but this year they took advantage of having upgraded equipment to offer two. This meant that on the Sunday morning both the new President and Vice President could be interviewed simultaneously, enabling greater radio coverage.

19.2.3   News photo page: a link from press releases to relevant high-resolution photos on the website.

19.2.4   Really Simple Syndication (RSS : a means by which live automatically updating headlines are communicated from one website to another website, with links to the full story on the originating website) feeds for news releases. This enables journalists to subscribe to our releases to receive them automatically.

19.2.5   An immediate release following the meetings of the Methodist Council was launched at the April meeting. The release was written during Council, approved at the end and issued within an hour. The goal is to stress the importance of Council meetings, and these quick releases are gaining more coverage than before.

19.2.6   Notable successes of 2005:

-    Narnia: MethodistChildren launched a Narnia competition and Christmas service on their website. This drew (and continues to draw) a lot of media attention.

- The launch of the Methodist podcast garnered a lot of media attention in August, with 11 interviews with BBC local radio.

- An ecumenical children's survey and a series of related workshops, along with the launch of the MethodistChildren web site, won a lot of coverage in September.

- Conference 2005 had some topics of interest to the nationals, including Methodist Bishops and same sex civil partnerships. These won a lot of coverage, not all of it accurate.

- Jointly with the Salvation Army, the Methodist Church won the best PR Strategy award at the 2005 Third Sector Excellence Awards.

- Revived and improved the Live Topics list, a monthly note on all the upcoming events we might or will comment on, as well as likely upcoming releases. Following the team restructuring into Teams and Sections the coverage of the List was expanded.

19.3 Plans for the future

19.3.1 Overview

19.3.2 The Methodist Church still has more members than any one of the UK's political parties. More people attend on an average Sunday than will go to a Premiership football match that same weekend. The Methodist Church should not be afraid of trying to make its voice heard. There is inevitable competition for 'air space' when the press would rather talk to the CofE or Roman Catholics, but that is no reason not to try.

We need to be honest about the numerical decline in our membership, but we should not allow this to become our only story. There are a lot of initiatives that deserve a wider audience.

The Methodist Recorder is a good newspaper, and provides a useful service, but it still has only 20-30,000 readers. In other words, about 90% of all Methodist members do not read the Recorder each week.

The Church must seriously consider how it communicates with the wider world and make best use of media services.

19.3.3 The Media Service wants to increase the range and number of stories that it issues releases on. To do this, an education and awareness raising process for the whole Connexional Team about what can be offered and what can be done, and the importance of giving as much time as possible to prepare releases, needs to be undertaken.

19.3.4   The service wants to encourage the Team, and ultimately the whole Connexion, to think wider when it comes to media work, and not just be satisfied with placing an article in the Methodist Recorder.

19.3.5   The service wants to encourage more Districts to appoint a District Communication Officer (DCO). Currently there are about 20 out of the 33, but there are great opportunities for placing Methodist stories with local media, and a number of opportunities are being missed.

19.3.6   Consideration needs to be taken on the appropriate staffing of a media service for the size of organisation.

19.4   Recommendations Media Services

The PMG would like to commend the significant strides in development that the Media Services has made in the last few years.

19.4.1   The Media service continues to build on its recent successes.

19.4.2   Support work continues with Connexional Team staff in making the best use of the media services.

19.4.3   Development work continues with Districts in establishing DCO and making further improvements.

19.4.4   As work develops review of the work and consideration of appropriate staffing levels is undertaken.

20. Equalities and Diversity

In the context of this report it is not possible to do full justice to this area of concern. Whilst the main thrust of the subject may need to be voice elsewhere there are some associated factors which need consideration in the area of communications.

20.1 Current Situation

20.2 Decision Making

20.3   It is not only important that prejudice and discrimination should play not part, but also important that they should be seen, heard and understood to play not part.

20.4   Without transparency on these issues, and evidence about how decisions are made, the assumption by minorities and oppressed groups is that there isn't any equal opportunities thinking nor any awareness of equalities and diversity issues.

20.5   Training and awareness raising

If those responsible for communicating with the wider Church had an increased awareness of equalities and diversity issues then information would be better received.

20.5   This requires using the expertise of those who (a) live the experience of being in minority or oppressed groups and (b) are conscious about their experience.

20.6   Increased levels of training and awareness raising would also help in tackling institutional racism. Current observation is that in the Connexional Team, people don't want to be racist, ignore issues of racism and don't hold the racial justice team to proper account. If there were less fear of being white, and more awareness of white privilege there would be a better chance of challenging the blocks in the systems and structures. This impacts on how we communicate and what we communicate and is particularly stark in the context of external communications.

20.7   Some of the issues of equality and diversity that relate to access to and use of information technology, and the use of appropriate images are touched on in section 17.

In addition some standards of practice need to be agreed and systems put in place to ensure appropriate use of image and language in all forms of communication medium.

20. Current Developments
20.1   Work is currently being done on developing an equal opportunities policy on practice and an action plan for the Connexional Team potentially for Conference 07.

21. Recommendations: Equalities and Diversity

21.1   The Project Management Group believes that the equalities and diversity reports for 2007 and 2008 are likely to contain material relevant to the development of communications throughout the Connexion, and recommends that full consideration be given in due course to its recommendations.

21.2 Awareness-raising and training about how issues of equality and diversity affect communication should be made mandatory for Connexional Team staff and senior office holders.

21.3 Decision making practices and outcomes should be made more transparent.

Improving Communications in the Methodist Church

Recommendations

1.   Primary Underpinning Recommendation

The Methodist Church should move from a "push" to a "pull" model of communication. Priority should be given to communications that are informal, horizontal and open to all.

To support this objective resources need to be transferred
- from a major emphasis on supporting central functions to one on equipping Circuits and Districts to communicate effectively
- from paper-based communications to electronic communications,
- from widely and indiscriminately distributed mailings to development and use of a database for targeted application,
- from using traditional techniques and methods to engaging radically and innovatively with new technological advances in communicating that are geared to mission.

2.   Priorities
The Project Management Group (PMG) strongly believes that The Methodist Church must recognise that effective communications are essential to the realisation of Our Calling and the Priorities of the Methodist Church and recommends:

2.1   Investment in communications must therefore be seen as mission-critical; consideration should be given not purely to cutting budgets by 30% but to investing in modern communication systems and equipping the church to use them effectively.

2.2   Initiatives should be undertaken with urgency to enable and encourage individual churches, Circuits and Districts, The Methodist Conference, the Council and the Connexional Team to identify in what ways they will each improve and develop effective communication methods to support achieving the Priorities.

3.   Communication Policy

3.1 The Principles of Good Communication set out in the accompanying report should be adopted for the whole Connexion.

3.2 Ways in which to achieve more 'pull' than 'push' forms of communication (as set out in the report) should be further explored and enacted as appropriate.

3.3 Ways in which the Connexion in all its manifestations can improve Church 'body language' (as set out in the report) should be further explored and enacted as appropriate.

3.4 A commitment should be made to work towards achieving a specific kite mark in this area e.g. the Crystal Mark.

4. Church 'body language'

4.1 Reception areas, physically and in terms of personnel, should be recognised as vital places where the body language of the Connexion is first encountered.

4.2 The possibility of creating hospitable, friendly meeting place(s) should be explored in which connexional building(s) become more than suites of offices.

4.3 An awareness of the power and influence of body language should become a regular part of input and reflection upon all Connexional publications and its website, so that they appear open, inviting, listening, and interested, rather than introverted, with limited access, 'precious', and vain.

4.4 A time limited initiative should be undertaken to encourage understanding of the adoption of the key elements of the report in respect of body language throughout the Connexion.

5. Connexional Team Communications

5.1 A small dedicated Communications Team should be established that includes media, web design, publications and marketing.

This team should be responsible for:
- managing the co-ordination of the strategy for communication across the Connexional Team,

developing integrated systems and establishing internal services such as proof reading
- establishing standards of practice for all forms of communication
- working closely with those responsible for advocacy
- working closely with the web writer
- establishing a user group
- ensuring appropriate advice it sought on protocols, legal requirements, data protection, subject access etc.

5.2 Appropriate structures and systems should be put in place to ensure effective and efficient production of publications.

5.3 As a model of good practice an accessible digest of the outcomes of Project 7 on the development of the working relationship between mph and the Connexional Team should be created. This should be made available for all those within the Team and elsewhere for whom knowledge of the outcomes is essential.

6.   Connexional Team Internal Communications

6.1 The PMG recommends establishing ways in which members of Connexional Team can be encouraged and enabled to interact with each other, both formally and informally. The group consider that this would be enabled and facilitated by serious consideration and action on the following:

- the value and desirability of a single 'return point'/node [e.g. a single building] to bring together members of the Team who are based in offices or working in a dispersed fashion
- the need for the reception area to be recognised as a vital place where the body language of the Methodist Church is first encountered, and for this to be developed both physically and in terms of personnel
- the adoption of Principles of Good Practice

6.2 A project should be conducted to find new ways of working that enhance informal communications among the Team. This should include the creation of welcoming, accessible space(s) for informal meetings of Team members, in recognition of the importance of face-to-face contact for good Team relationships and working and so that the building becomes more than suites of offices and the inhabitants more of a team and a community.

6.3 To enable effective communications systems the Connexional Team must:

- Explain the systems (such as the intranet), so that staff see the benefits and want to use them
- Empower the staff so that they have the tools to use them effectively.

7. Connexional Team Communicating with the Connexion

7.1 A Methodist Enquiry Service and help desk should be created.

7.2 Ways should be found of achieving greater targeting of mailings to specific constituencies. This needs to be done with close reference to the quality and content of the Connexional database.

7.3 Establish the role and appropriate system for providing a 'duty officer'.

8. Communication across the Connexion

The PMG recognises that reliance on a centralised system for distributing information within the church needs to be overcome and recommends the following:

8.1 A commitment should be made to reducing catch-all centralised mailings, developing more effective systems for selective mailings, and providing a system by which information can be accessed upon request.

8.2 The role of the Circuit should be strengthened as the principal organisational unit within the Methodist Church.

8.3 Communications within and between Circuits should be enabled through the development and use of a comprehensive church member database.

8.4 Where needed Circuits (and Districts) should be encouraged to seek help, training and support in the development of linked websites.

8.5 All Districts should appoint a Communications Support person to provide advice and support to Circuits and churches.

9. Communications from Conference

9.1 The Conference Review Group should be encouraged to continue to develop radical and innovative ways of improving the experience and communication of, to and from Conference.

9.2 Methodist Council and Conference should agree that reports which are of interest to the whole Church or of sufficient import, should be produced in formats best suited to engage people and facilitate local reception and reflection.

9.3 The production values and success of Time to talk of God report be used as a benchmark for quality and effectiveness of such reports.

9.4 A commitment should be made to thorough preparation of material prior to Conference, and post-Conference production and publication of material should be undertaken with alacrity as a matter of good practice.

9.5 Improvements in communication practices at Conference should be continued and regularly reviewed to ensure further innovations.

9.6 The initiative of broadcasting Conference should be continued and developed further.

10. Electronic Communications

10.1 The Methodist Council *(Church? Conference?)* should agree an Electronic Communications Policy.

10.2 The Methodist Church should recognise that electronic communication is the most effective and efficient form of communication in the 21st Century, both for internal and for external usage.

10.3 The Methodist Church should affirm its intention to make electronic communication the primary means of communication, to be used whenever and wherever it is possible.

10.4 As a matter of policy, the Church should prioritise and encourage the use of electronic communications.

10.5 Commensurate with this policy, the Church should invest £500,000 in electronic communications over the period 2007-2010.

10.6 The Methodist Church should also recognise that for some of its members, electronic communications are not and, for the foreseeable future, will not be possible. It should therefore support the provision of paper copies of material on an "as needed" or "when requested" basis.   Similarly the Church should , wherever possible, take account of special needs (e.g. the provision of large print or Braille material).

10.7 There should be close scrutiny of expenditure on communications. The development of oversight, management and monitoring of the central communications budget should be strongly encouraged. At the same time the anticipated cost benefits of investing in electronic communications should be made readily available.

10.8 All employees and office holders in the Church should be required to sign a declaration accepting the Church's electronic communications naming convention, and agreeing to have their contact details included within the Methodist Church contacts database.

11. Database

A comprehensive database of Methodist Church office bearers, members and adherents is critical to the future of the church. The aim should be to have all members (and adherents) on such a database by 2010.

The current "silo" mentality of separate databases needs to be pulled down and replaced with a more inter-dependent and mutually supportive model.

11.1 The vision for the database and its potential use should be shared more widely across the Team in particular with those working in communications, marketing and advocacy.

11.2 Work should continue on developing a properly managed and resourced project to create a single Connexional database.

11.3 Processes for accessing, keying-in, interrogating and analysing data should be kept as accessible as possible.

11.4 Ways should be found of ensuring that when people are asked to communicate information to one part of the Connexion, the purposes for which it is collected and may be used are known.

11.5   Data should be collected and analysed that will best serve the mission of the church.

11.6   A system should be developed of enabling secure access to data which build networks, share information, develop community and release the Connexional Team from some of the mundane but essential queries with which it currently deals.

12. Website

12.1   Work on updating the website should be continued.

12.2   A network should be established for the Methodist Church on the lines of MSN.

12.3   Funding should be provided for an exploratory project to explore the potential of virtual sites as a form of mission, providing a new way of being church in the virtual existences that are inhabited by many who do not come into contact with the Methodist Church. The PMG urges that the aim of engaging with the missing generation can be facilitated this way. This could be done by taking up residence in an established virtual site such as Second Life.

12.4   A 'my prayer space' virtual existence (akin to the Habbo site) should be created where people can design their own space for prayer and interact with 'gifts'.

12.5   Consideration should be given as to how best to meet equalities and diversity needs.

12.6   The website policy should be updated in the light of this report and its recommendations and circulated widely.

13. Recommendations Media Services

The PMG would like to commend the significant strides in development that the Media Services have made in the last few years and recommend:

13.1   The Media service continues to build on its recent successes.

13.2   Support work continues with Connexional Team staff in making the best use of the media services.

13.3 Development work continues with Districts in establishing DCO and making further improvements.

13.4 As work develops review of the work and consideration of appropriate staffing levels in undertaken.

14 Equalities and Diversity

14.1 The Project Management Group believes that the equalities and diversity   reports for 2007 and 2008 are likely to contain material relevant to the development of communications throughout the Connexion, and recommends that full consideration be given in due course to its recommendations.

14.2 Awareness-raising and training about how issues of equality and diversity affect communication should be made mandatory for Connexional Team staff and senior office holders.

Partnerships: Purpose and Practice

Contents
1. Introduction – brief background information
2. What is Partnership? – brief definition and further exploration
3. Context – reflections on some key world issues
4. Theological Underpinning – reflections on some key theological issues
5. Partnership checklist – developed through conversations with partners
6. Practical Expression – explores the implications of the preceding discussion

1. Introduction

1.1. This document has been prepared as part of a wider project initiated by the British Methodist Conference to consider the reconfiguration of our international mission relationships for the future. It aims to explore what it means for the Methodist Church in Great Britain to be in partnership with Methodist and Methodist-related Churches beyond Britain and Ireland at this particular moment in our shared history and to consider the implications of this for the way we engage in partnership (see Appendix 1 for more about partner churches).

1.2. The earlier versions of this document have been shared with staff in the World Church Office, and an All Districts Consultation in March 2006. After further work a revised version was widely circulated in the connexion which was then the subject of a workshop at the Conference in Edinburgh and sent to all partner churches. Input from these consultations formed the basis for conversations in Seoul in July 2006. This revised version draws on this input and is now offered to the Methodist Council to indicate the basis of the detailed recommendations of the Project Management Group 6.

1.3. The Priorities of the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) talk about working in partnership with others wherever possible. Many 'international mission relationships' are long established. Rather than presume on common understandings of 'partnership', this introduction sets outs some definitions which are intended to clarify how particular words are used.

2. What is Partnership?

2.1. As commonly understood in a secular setting, partnership working involves two or more parties working to achieve common interests and goals. One aspect of mission, as stated in the *Statement of Purpose*, adopted by the British Methodist Conference in1996 speaks of "building partnerships with other churches and other groups who share some of our mission aims." (see appendix 2)

2.2. MCB recognises the limitation of approaching questions of partnership from our own particular context and we must not presume that our understanding is the normative one. We also recognise that we often do not begin conversations about partnerships as equal partners. ***MCB has situational and financial resources and power from which it cannot escape.*** The challenge for us is to use this with integrity

2.3. Our relationships with partner churches are like ***family relationships***. In some cases this is because of our shared history – it has been like a parent-child

relationship so that the British Methodist Church has been thought of as the 'mother church'. Now that all but one of those churches are autonomous the family connection remains, but hopefully is now adult to adult. In all cases, whatever the history, ***the basis of the relationship is that we are sisters and brothers 'in Christ', part of the one Church of Jesus Christ***, children of one Father (Romans 12.1-5). The importance of this "givenness" should not be underestimated.

2.4. Some of our partners, notably those in Latin America where the *lingua franca* is Spanish or Portuguese, dislike 'partnership' language because for them it is associated more with the worlds of business or commerce. They would prefer words that have associations with companionship or friendship. The strength of those terms is that they testify to relationships freely entered into.

2.5. Within these broad understandings, whether the language used is of family or friendship, a clear distinction can be made between **relationships** (long term, open ended and needing continual renewal) and **partnership working** (time limited but also renewable). Building relationships between Churches enables the establishment of shared values and makes the process of negotiating specific partnership agreements and pieces of work easier. Given the finite resources available to MCB this leads to three inter-related questions:
  - o how do we most fruitfully sustain these relationships?
  - o how do we decide to undertake joint activities?
  - o how do we hold the balance between them?

3. Context

3.1. We live in a world where the multiplicity of links and interconnections transcends nation states and, within or beyond them, other social groupings through which people have a sense of belonging. This means that events, decisions and activities in one part of the world have a significant effect on individuals and communities in another part of the world. Instantaneous communications mean knowledge and culture can be shared around the globe simultaneously, leading to new forms and networks of activity, interaction and power.

3.2. This global network brings with it great opportunities, but also an ever increasing potential for exploitation.   A major challenge for MCB and its partners is how to respond with integrity to this complex network of economic, political and social relationships, both within the church and in wider society.

3.3. MCB and its partner churches perceive four key processes going on in this network at the current time: ***cultural homogenisation, economic change, environmental degradation*** and ***fear***. Although the way they are understood varies according to our place in the world and we need to continue to engage with each other about the way our churches respond to them, we agree that these are the important issues for us all.

3.4. We also recognise how easy it is in Britain (and perhaps elsewhere) to see the way in which we understand and respond to concepts such as ***democracy, capitalism and human rights***, as normative.

3.5. **Cultural homogenisation** is the process whereby societies and individuals within those societies take on the values, beliefs and artefacts of an emerging global culture, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritance. It can be argued that this is inevitable within a global economy as traditional forms of social organisation based on tribe or family are replaced by economically rational

ones based on function and efficiency and a desire by individuals to achieve a greater recognition of their own status. However the impact on local cultures can be enormous leading to mimicry, reaction, tension and commodification. Yet this is a global experience, felt as much in the UK as it is anywhere else in the world. It can therefore be seen as shared experience, a reality to be engaged with by the church both globally and mutually.

3.6. **Economic change.** The detail of how world economic systems continue to develop is complex and contentious and oversimplification is unhelpful. Concepts such as rich and poor need careful exploration in a world which, arguably, is seeing increasing levels of poverty and an increase in the gap between rich and poor but at the same time an overall increase in the wealth of the majority of people throughout the world, including the poorest. Yet change is undeniably happening and MCB needs to work with its partners on how we respond to that change, particularly within the context of our decreasing financial reserves.

3.7. **Environmental degradation**. The debate over global warming highlights our interdependency in maintaining a sustainable environment for all humankind. Environmental awareness has been an emerging and developing issue in Britain but we recognise that this issue is viewed very differently in other parts of the world, including the United States.

3.8. **Fear leading to violence and conflict**. It is in some ways paradoxical that the ability for people to come together, learn from and share with each other not only promotes both greater understanding but also in some contexts mistrust and antagonism. In turn this has led to real or perceived feeling of fear of the stranger and the unknown, sometimes expressed through conflicts which often appear to be inter-religious. To combat that fear needs to be a primary concern of the whole Methodist family.

3.9. Consultation with our partner churches in 2006 has reinforced our sense in Britain of the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, highlighted at the consultation held with partner churches at Llandudno in 2003 (see Appendix 3) and the challenge it presents to ourselves and our partners to work out appropriate responses in our own particular situations.

4. Theological Underpinning

4.1. **Oikoumene**

4.1.1 The Greek word oikoumene (which gives us the word 'ecumenical') is also behind what we mean by 'global'.[1]

4.1.2 *We need to keep sharp and clear the vision that we are part of the one World Church living in a richly diverse world which God loves and in which the Church is called to share in the birth pangs of a new world, reconciled and renewed.*

This will be enabled through our relationships with partner Churches worldwide, the sharing of resources, giving and receiving in mission and involvement in worldwide ecumenical instruments, particularly the World

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[1] The root meaning of the word has to do with 'house' and 'household' and oikoumene can mean 'the whole inhabited earth', or, as it is sometimes put, 'the household of life'. In that sense the task of this project is ecumenical: not to be conceived as narrowly about inter-Church relations but about the whole life of the world.

Council of Churches and the World Methodist Council. (Conference Agenda 2001, p.330f.)

4.2 **Koinonia**

4.2.1 *Another key New Testament word is koinonia.[2] In the section of the 1999 Conference Statement of the British Methodist Church on the nature of the Church, Called to Love and Praise, that deals with this word there is a quotation from a World Council of Churches (WCC) document:*

"The divine gift of koinonia is both a gift and a calling. The dynamic activity of God drawing us into communion also entails the calling of Christians and Christian communities to manifest koinonia as a sign and foretaste of God's intention for humankind.

…...The dynamic process of koinonia involves the recognition of the complementarity of human beings. As individuals and as communities, we are confronted by the others in their otherness, e.g., theologically, ethnically, culturally.   Koinonia requires respect for the other and a willingness to listen to the other and to seek to understand them."

4.2.2   *The text continues:*
[*Koinonia*] *is fundamental to the environment in which the Christian pilgrimage is undertaken. It implies togetherness, mutuality and reciprocity, requiring mutual recognition and a , common acceptance of each other's identity. …*

4.2.3   *[Koinonia] … is fundamentally an experience, belonging to the whole people of God … [involving] both communion and community.[3]*

4.3 **Connexionalism**

4.3.1 Called to Love and Praise sees connexionalism as integral to Methodism from its beginning

… the Methodist sense of belonging, at its best, derives from a consciousness that all Christians are related at all levels of the church to each other [4]

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[2] Its root meaning has to do with that which is common. As it is used in the New Testament there is no dichotomy between spiritual and material. So it is the word used to describe the new life experienced in the Church as communion both with God and with each other, the koinonia, sharing, of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13.13) but it is also used in reference to the collection for the church in Jerusalem: a very practical response to the richness of God's grace expressed in the bearing of one another's burdens and the sharing of gifts (2 Corinthians 8.1-9). This common life we share is equally a sharing of the divine love and a commitment to one another and a mutual responsibility (Philippians 2.1-5). Mutual sharing, as being at the heart of Christian faith and life, is central to the Methodist understanding of what it is to be Church and to the relations between churches. In today's context that has to do with relationships within the worldwide Church. Practical partnerships are an expression of this principle. In the synoptic gospels the same idea is expressed in 'kingdom' language and in John's gospel with references to 'eternal' or 'abundant' life – "life in all its fullness" (John 10.10). But the koinonia we experience is not yet fully realised; the kingdom is both here already (Mark 1.15 etc) and yet to come (Matthew 6.10); whatever our experience, life as we know it in the Church as much as in other aspects of our lives, falls short of the life God intends for the whole of humankind.
[3] Called to Love and Praise 3.1.7-9
[4] op. cit.4.6.4

It also claims that connexionalism is implied in the practice of the apostolic church. The apostles travelled and conferred regularly with other Christians on matters of common concern in mission. The needs and virtues of particular churches were shared and individual churches reminded that their local koinonia in Christ was rooted within the universal: 'All things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's'
(1 Corinthians 3.23).

Such teaching points to the privilege and duty of each local church to adhere to, to draw from and contribute to the riches of life in Christ.[5]

4.3.2 This sense of connexionalism is given practical expression today in links with partner churches through prayer, the sharing of information, the sending and receiving of personnel and cross-representation at Conference level. This '*sharing of resources which crosses both denominational and national boundaries*' may involve bi-lateral links, multi-lateral relationships with regional groupings of Churches and with the worldwide fellowship of Methodist and United Churches through the opportunities for consultation offered by the World Methodist Council.

4.4 Sharing in God's Mission

4.4.1   The Methodist tradition emphasises the universality of grace: the "vast, unfathomable sea" of God's goodness and truth "streams the whole creation reach", "enough for all enough for each" (Hymns and Psalms 48). Each individual is loved by God and none is outside God's love. That gives the Church confidence as it shares in God's mission, expressing in particular situations God's commitment to all. Relationships between churches, as they work together, have the potential to prove "the length, and breadth, and height … and depth of sovereign grace" (Hymns and Psalms 46) and so enable the Church as it shares in the worship and mission of God.

4.4.2   We share together in God's mission with all the partner churches to which the Methodist Church in Britain relates. So it is proper to ask to what extent British Methodism's partner churches can endorse the understandings and commitments adopted by the British Conference which are behind this project ether (Statement of Purpose 1996, Our Calling 2000, and Priorities for the Methodist Church 2004). Do they find alienating the lack of recognition in the titles of those documents of other Methodist Churches? [6]

4.5 Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment

4.5.1   An important part of the consultation with our partner churches was exploring, through these three words, different understandings of the way we are called to share in God's mission. These differences arise from our diverse global contexts and ways of reading the Bible.

4.5.2   One starting point is the recognition that God's purposes in creation and redemption are for the whole of humankind created in the image of God.[7]

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[5] *op. cit. 4.6.5 Although in this context 'local church' is referring to local churches within British Methodism it is helpful here to read it in the sense that would think of the Church in each country as the local church, so that the Argentinean Church, the British Church, the Nigerian Church etc. is each a local church.*

[6] So, for example, how widely owned would be the list in the 1996 Statement which speaks of a number of dimensions and methods of Christian mission? See Appendix 1.

[7] Genesis 1.27; Acts 17.24-28; Revelation 5.9-10, 7.9-10

Liberation theologians in Latin America, Africa and Asia all, in different ways, build on the conviction that the equal worth of all persons needs to be expressed in transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.

4.5.3 Transformation (or conversion) is an ongoing process, a total re-orientation affecting every aspect of our personal being and common life. It will include the sometimes costly rejection of all that dehumanises and desecrates life and the promotion of peace and justice in society. It will mean constant review as to whether what we do contradicts or connects with God's work of transformation.

4.5.4 The church's mission, led by the Holy Spirit, is the following of Christ in the way of incarnation and solidarity, walking the way of the cross. As it walks in the way of Christ, in the midst of a broken and violent world, the church itself undergoes deep and often painful transformation. The British Methodist Church, for example, struggles with issues of power and privilege. To adapt words Charles Wesley applied to the individual believer: the Church believes 'in hope, against all human hope' that God can raise it up, form it in Christ and perfect it in love.[8]

4.5.5 One of the aims of God's mission is **reconciliation** [9] where there is the same dynamic – the Church sharing the vulnerability of Christ in seeking the restoration of broken relationships but needing also to experience that reconciliation in its own life.

4.5.6. The language of **empowerment** is even more ambiguous. The New Testament bears clear witness to God sharing power (*dunamis*) with people for participation in God's mission (Acts 1: 8). Again, the calling of the Church is to resist the temptation to misuse power and to walk in the way of Christ where power is shared with all.

5   Partnership: A Check-List

5.1 Conversations with our partners suggest that the following check-list will be helpful in evaluating existing partnerships and developing proposals for new ones. This list is not exhaustive and is not intended to be a straitjacket. When we confer with our partner churches together, when we are seeking better to understand each other and when there are detailed negotiations about specific expressions of partnership we are primarily seeking to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

5.1.1 Partnership is based upon mutuality – reciprocity, sharing and valuing each other.

5.1.2 Partnership is based upon trust – respect, ability to share, willingness to learn.

5.1.3 Partnership values the diversity of culture, understanding and learning that each partner brings.

5.1.4 Partnership recognises the need for change, development and growth and a willingness to be transformed.

5.1.5 Partnership is the ability to challenge and be challenged.

5.1.6 Partnership is celebration.

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[8] Hymns and Psalms 693
[9] 2 Corinthians 5.19

5.1.7　Partnership is recognising difference; that we are both separate and together.

5.1.8　Partnership is about what we can achieve together.

5.1.9　Partnership is sharing power and enabling each other.

5.1.10　Partnership is built upon justice and takes justice into account.

5.1.11　Partnership is about being open to each others needs and vulnerabilities and recognising our own needs and vulnerabilities.

6.　　Practical Expression

6.1　Partnership offers opportunities to engage more richly in learning, praying and serving through an exchange of resources, personnel and ideas. This involves crossing boundaries in different ways for encounter and transformation of individuals and communities. Such partnerships are risk-taking, open to shock and surprise in the encounter with the 'other'.

6.2　In seeking practical expressions of partnership in this context, MCB recognises the mutual worth of simply being in relationship with each other and the learning and growth which come from this. However we also recognise our cultural and sometimes legal need, as Western Europeans, for our partnerships to have identifiable outcomes. MCB is committed to working with its partners to achieve an appropriate balance between togetherness and outcome, recognising that mutual learning and growth are often gradual processes which take a long time.

6.3　MCB is committed to developing the new, alongside the continuing process of evaluating and reenergising our existing partnerships for the mutual benefit of everyone involved.   In doing this, MCB recognises that our past pattern of partnerships may not be the future pattern.

6.4　MCB has often in the past found it culturally easier to offer gifts to the world church than to receive gifts from the world church. In future expressions of partnership MCB is committed to receiving the immense gifts that partner churches have to offer us.

6.5　It will always be necessary to bring to any process that seeks to develop and work within partnership the reality of British, Western culture and its inherent power dynamics and acknowledge the inequality of the current situation. There must be recognition that in partnerships there are always issues about control/power and that these needs acknowledging, agreeing and managing.

6.6　Many existing partnerships are in line with the priorities of the MCB. There is a need also to listen to the differing priorities of partners and negotiate the terms of partnerships to recognise both. The desire of the MCB is to work in solidarity with others in mutual, equal partnerships. This is always going to be easier to state than to achieve.

6.7 For partnerships to deliver there need to be clear communications and expectations agreed between the partners. The approach should be one of shared decision making. For the partnership to be successful it must have a wider remit than a purely financial one and will always include praying for each other.

6.8 Partnerships need to be rooted in trust for one another. This is developed through honesty of communication, respect for difference and recognition of what we have in common. Trust should allow partners to express frustration, hurt and disappointment as well as thankfulness and joy.

6.9 MCB is part of an international community of Methodists and Christians expressed through membership of bodies such as the World Methodist Council and the World Council of Churches. These bodies play an important role in maintaining and developing the network of relationships necessary to engage in individual partnerships.

Appendix 1

There are presently around sixty partner churches. Most of them attended the special consultation held in Llandudno in 2003. The names of those churches are listed at the end of Appendix 3. There is a special relationship with the Methodist Church in Ireland, symbolised in the President of the British Conference also being the President of the Irish Conference. There is also a long tradition of co-operation between the two churches through their respective missionary societies and their successors in Britain.

Appendix 2 – Key Policy Statements

A. Statement of Purpose (as adopted by The British Methodist Conference 1996)

THE CALLING OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN GREAT BRITIAN

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.

Worship in the Methodist Church is expressed in many ways. In worship the Church
- gives praise to God in Christ through the Spirit
- opens itself to God's transforming love
- receives and reflects on the gospel of God's ways in the world
- offers itself to share in God's costly action in the world

Methodism endorses many dimensions and methods of Christian mission. In particular it affirms that mission includes:
- telling the good news of Jesus
- calling people to faith in Jesus Christ and to Christian discipleship
- caring for individual people and communities
- sharing in the task of education and social and spiritual development
- struggling for a just world
- being alongside the poor
- becoming friends with people of different cultures and faiths

- caring for the earth
- building partnerships with other churches and other groups who share some of our mission aims

B. Our Calling (as adopted by The British Methodist Conference 2000)

The Church exists to:
- Increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love
- Help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support and care
- Become a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice
- Make more followers of Jesus Christ

C. Priorities for the Methodist Church (as adopted by The British Conference 2004)

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer

Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide

Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved

Encouraging fresh ways of being Church

Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

For the full text of 'Priorities of the Methodist Church' go to www.methodist.org.uk and look at News and Conference Reports.

Appendix 3

MESSAGE TO OUR CHURCHES

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18, 19)

We, the representatives of 61 Methodist, United and Uniting Churches around the world, greet you warmly in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are in Britain, at the invitation of the British Methodist Church, to take part in the Tercentenary Celebrations of John Wesley's birth and now to consult together as partner churches on the theme of "Challenges and Choices".

We affirm that Methodism is committed to apostolic faith, evangelism, discipline, preaching of the Word, class meetings, personal and social holiness - features that ought to continue to be evident in our work and witness as they are relevant to this and every age.

We affirm our commitment to the reign of God and the proclamation of good news for all. We feel challenged to continue to condemn the world economic system that has produced massive unemployment, exploitation of women and children, forced migration, inadequate health care, impoverishment, corruption, greed and violence. To this end it is our responsibility to co-operate with organisations, agencies and groups that share similar aims.

We have been challenged afresh by the prophetic words of Scripture and made increasingly aware of the grace of God that is at work in our lives. We are called upon to engage in mission that is rooted in the justice of God's reign. The gospel so proclaimed brings salvation in Christ, promotes healing and solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, with the spiritually and materially poor and with the marginalised. We will continue to rely upon the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth and who enables us to proclaim the gospel with conviction and power.

We proclaim the sanctity of life - a gift from God. We deplore the wanton killing of human beings whether in war or as they go about their everyday activities. We consider it criminal that children are lured onto the field of battle and so grow up with hate. Furthermore we condemn the abuse of women and children for prostitution.

We believe that it is important to keep before our people the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is tearing apart communities across the world. To this end, we consider it right and necessary to talk intentionally about sexual relationships and behaviour with our congregations, so that human sexuality is recognised as a gift from God to be used responsibly. We challenge each of our churches to work out appropriate responses in their particular situations.

We acknowledge how much we depend upon one another as members of the universal body of Christ. We agree to strengthen our partnership links and to facilitate the sharing of theological insights, of information, of personnel and of material resources that will continue to be an expression of our participation in God's mission. We invite all our churches to join together in this commitment as partners in our common mission.

Llandudno, Wales
June 27, 2003

AFRICA
Eglise Protestante Méthodiste du Bénin
Eglise Protestante Méthodiste en Côte d'Ivoire
Methodist Church The Gambia
Methodist Church Ghana
Methodist Church Nigeria
Methodist Church in Zimbabwe
Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
Iglesia Metodista de Guinea Ecuatorial
Methodist Church Kenya
Methodist Church Sierra Leone
Methodist Church of Southern Africa
Eglise Métodiste du Togo
United Church of Zambia

AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN
The United Methodist Church
Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Argentina
Methodist Church in Brazil
Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana
Iglesia Evangelica Nacional Metodista Primitiva de Guatemala
Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas
Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en Bolivia
United Church of Canada
Iglesia Metodista de Chile
Iglesia Metodista de Colombia
Iglesia Metodista en Cuba
Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Unida del Ecuador
Iglesia Metodista de México
Evangelical Methodist Church of Panama
Iglesia Metodista del Perú
Evangelical Methodist Church, Uruguay

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
Church of Bangladesh
Church of North India
Church of South India
Church of Pakistan
The Methodist Church, Sri Lanka
The Methodist Church, Upper Myanmar
Gereja Methodist Indonesia
The Methodist Church in Malaysia
The Methodist Church in Singapore
The Methodist Church, Hong Kong
The United Church of Christ in Japan
The Korean Methodist Church
Methodist Church in Fiji
United Church in Papua New Guinea
Methodist Church in Samoa
The United Church in the Solomon Islands
Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
The Methodist Church of New Zealand
The Uniting Church in Australia

EUROPE

United Methodist Central Conferences of:
  Central & Southern Europe
Northern Europe
Germany
OPCEMI, Italy
Igreja Evangelica Metodista Portuguesa

Version 5: 8 Jan 07

Project 6: Reconfiguring World Church Partnerships

Report and Recommendations of the Project Management Group

A.   Membership of the Project Management Group

The membership of the Project Management Group (PMG) was:
　　Ms Anthea Cox, Co-ordinating Secretary
　　Rev Bernardino Mandlate, Minister of the Methodist Church of Southern
　　Africa, former World Church in Britain Mission Partner, stationed in the
　　London Mission *(North West)* Circuit
　　Rev Lionel Osborn, Chair, Newcastle District
　　Rev Peter Sulston, Co-ordinating Secretary (Chair)
　　Ms Helen Woodall, member of the Methodist Council and the Strategy and
　　Resources Committee, part of the Formation in world Mission Group
The group was supported by Luke Curran from the Policy Support and Research
Unit of the connexional Team until September 2006.

B.   Initial Brief

The overall objective of this Project was "to review the Methodist Church of Great
Britain's strategic understandings of world church partnerships and how they
relate to *Priorities for the Methodist Church."*

C.   *Priorities for the Methodist Church* and the Methodist Missionary Society

1.   As with all the ground-clearing projects the PMG has borne *Priorities for the
Methodist Church* in mind. It believes that the very first phrase of *Priorities* ("In
partnership with others wherever possible…"), taken with the reference to the
global reach of God's love and action and the commitment to working worldwide
expressed in *Priorities*, gives an inescapable international dimension to the work
of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. All the work in mission education done
by the connexional Team since 1996 to promote an understanding of God's
Mission as one, in and beyond Britain, has sprung from a deep conviction that for
Methodists such a worldwide vision is integrally linked to the Methodist way of
being Christian and being a Church within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic
Church.

2.   The Constitution of the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS)[10] is an historic and
contemporary text that encapsulates the way in which the British Methodist
tradition has always understood Christian discipleship in the Methodist way to
have a world dimension. Clause 3 of the MMS Constitution (Purposes) sets out
the ways in which the Methodist Fund for World Mission (FWM) may be used.
The PMG believes that the wording of this clause, although reflecting the shifting
understandings and realities of global mission and the place of Britain in the world
over the last 220 years, needs to be revisited so that those purposes are more
consistent with the British Methodist Church's current understanding of its
priorities. (Recommendation 1.1).

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[10] For the full Constitution, see CPD, pp.721-724 and for clauses 1-3, Appendix 1 below.

D. Way of working

1. The Project Management Group (PMG) has worked between January and December 2006. At the outset it identified key stakeholders in the work currently done by the connexional team to support the purposes of the Methodist Missionary Society(MMS).

2. The PMG, at the outset of its work, outlined its sense of why this project was necessary:
    a. It was good practice periodically to review long term partnerships.
    b. All areas of the life of the connexion were being encouraged to review their work in the light of *Priorities for the Methodist Church.*
    c. There is a changing resource structure, particularly in relation to finance which needs to be taken into account.
    d. There is a desire to ensure that the impact of our partnerships is maximised.

3. It identified two key tasks:
    a. to identify what it initially called the "Principles of Partnership" (the fruit of this work, revised after extensive consultation, is contained in the report *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice*); and
    b. a review of all the existing work and programmes of the World Church Office in the connexional Team with a view to making recommendations for future work.

4. In reviewing the current work, meetings were held with staff in the World Church Office and detailed written submissions were made by the responsible staff member about each area of work. These were followed up with one to one conversations. There were also conversations with the Secretary and Treasurer of MMS, and with representatives of MMS Ireland and the Secretary of the Irish Conference.[11]

5. This report relates to the second of the tasks but needs to be checked against *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice.* The PMG believes its recommendations follow from that report which it hopes will have wide circulation in and beyond the British connexion as a picture of current understandings (and therefore to be kept under review).

E. Current Work

1. The present World Church Office in the connexional Team is responsible on behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland for promoting and servicing relationships with partner churches overseas. It does this through enabling the mutual exchange of resources, information and personnel in worldwide partnerships and, with other parts of the Team playing its part in supporting the

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[11] The present World Church Office in the connexional Team acts on behalf of MMS Ireland and a substantial amount of the giving for world mission in Ireland contributes to the income of the (British) Methodist Fund for World Mission (FWM). There has also been consultation with Methodists for World Mission, some World Church in Britain Partners, Mission Partners and the World Methodist Council British Committee.

formation of people and churches for world mission through advocacy, education and training.

2. It does this in several ways through:
   a. four Area Secretaries (one each for Africa, Asia & Pacific, Caribbean & Latin America and Europe), who have primary responsibility for maintaining and developing relationships.
   b. a number of different ways of supporting the work of partner churches with General Grants, Special Grants and grants for Nationals in Mission Appointments.
   c. encouraging people to offer for service in a partner church and dealing with candidates, training and terms & conditions for the service of mission partners.
   d. a number of specific programmes, each with its own budget:
      i. Scholarship Programme (SALT – Scholarships and Leadership Training)
      ii. Experience Exchange Programme (with USPG, an Anglican mission agency)
      iii. Education, training, formation and research in global mission (delivered through the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies (SOCMS))[12]
      iv. World Church in Britain Partnership[13]
      v Mission Live (currently being re-introduced)

3. There are other areas in the work of the Team that are closely linked to the work of the World Church Office, either by function or structure, notably Mission Education, JMA, Women's Network and World Action.[14]

4. The Project Management Group concluded that the connexional Team had a role in enabling links to be made between who we are called to be here, in our locality in Britain and who we are called to be as Christians in the worldwide church. The World Church Office currently plays a vital part, with others in the Team, in enabling this to happen.

F.   Priorities for Future Work in the Light of *Team Focus*

1. The Project Management Group reviewed the different areas of work of the WCO but also tried to establish some sense of priority in the different functions / tasks involved. The following specific tasks were identified and placed in the following order of priority as those things that must be done or are best done at connexional 'level' in line with *Team Focus*:
   a. Diplomacy: acting as go betweens with partner churches[15]

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[12] This includes the Formation in World Mission programme which is the part-time responsibility of a staff member based at SOCMS.

[13] This programme is currently being relocated within the connexional Team and has not been through the filters process for Formation in Ministry.

[14] See Appendix 2 for a list of the bodies and other areas of the Team which contribute to maintaining and developing international mission partnerships. The issue of the relationship of MRDF to the connexional Team is addressed by the Project 4 report.

[15] The PMG saw this go-between function currently being delivered by the Area Secretaries. Each of them is, for their area, the key representative / link person to whom partner churches

b. Imparting vision, giving encouragement, learning from one another: this all involved mutual exchange between partner churches
c. Advocacy both to raise funds and of the work
d. Taking action together with partner churches
e. Mainstreaming into British Methodism of learning from relationships and partnerships beyond Britain
f. Having good systems for money transfer and ensuring proper accountability for the use of FWM[16]

2. The PMG saw prayer for each other as the responsibility of the whole Church.[17]

G. Future Model for the international mission relationships of the British Methodist Church

1. The PMG strongly believes that the phrase "international mission relationships", used in the *Partnerships: Policy and Practice* paper is more appropriate than the traditional language of 'World Church'. The latter is sometimes used as shorthand for the worldwide church and sometimes as a way of describing churches elsewhere than in Britain (as in 'learning from the World Church'). Neither is particularly helpful in enabling Methodists in Britain to have a sense of identity as Christians belonging to a particular church in a particular setting. 'International mission relationships' is a more accurate way of referring to the subject of this project than 'World Church Partnerships'.[18]

2. The PMG explored a number of possibilities but recommends the work being reconfigured within the overall work of the reshaped connexional Team as a whole. Our recommendations are intended to achieve this. This overall judgement and the specific recommendations will need to be rigorously tested. There would also need to be an assessment, as the details of the reconfigured team become clearer, of what capacity would be necessary to achieve all the recommendations and how that compares with the requirements of existing ways of working.

3. Whilst this is the basis for the recommendations below, the PMG did consider three other kinds of model for the way international mission relationships and the partnerships that spring from them might be managed in the future.

4. The first group of three assumed broadly the present WCO as the starting point.

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relate. They know the churches and are the bearers of vision, seeking to help each to understand the other. For proposals as to how this role is fulfilled in the future see section 2 of the Recommendations below.

[16] At present the Finance Office within the connexional Team handles a substantial amount of money in a large number of transactions in which money raised in various parts of the connexion is transmitted via Methodist Church House for work on specific projects or in particular places within the work of a partner church. There are substantial costs in time as well as bank charges etc. in giving this service and a responsibility to have a complete audit trail for all such moneys. This is a different exercise from the other substantial task of dealing with donations to FWM.

[17] cf. *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice, 5.7* and NB the importance of the Methodist Prayer Handbook as a resource for the whole connexion and an important sign of worldwide partnerships in mission

[18] See *Partnerships: Purpose and Priorities* passim and section C above.

a.i.   the present WCO operating on a reduced scale

To an extent this has been tried in the past, with limited success. Whilst it has been suggested that the current way of working is very cost-effective when compared to similar bodies (e.g. USPG, an Anglican mission agency with which there is currently considerable co-operation) for the amount of work done, nevertheless as the outline shape of the reconfigured connexional Team has begun to emerge the PMG has found it difficult to see how this would fit into the proposed pattern.

a.ii.   the present WCO becoming a freestanding mission "agency"

In this scenario the resources of FWM would pass entirely to the agency which would become responsible for both its use and advocacy / fund-raising. This might be good from an advocacy point of view but would it be a better way of working? If the vision is of church to church relationships it would be hard to see how those relationships could be sustained through an agency. More fundamentally the PMG did not believe it was consistent with our understanding of connexion and church (see *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice*, especially section 3*).*

a.iii   the present WCO becoming a mission "agency" within MCB (with a service level agreement).

In this scenario an agency would be formed within the British connexion to use the funds from FWM in line with a service level agreement to deliver core partnership functions and advocacy of the fund. This would be good from an advocacy point of view. It could be linked to the emerging governance arrangements for the FWM. It would make the work slightly more autonomous while remaining an integral part of what was done connexionally within the British church. There would be complete transparency about the way the income of FWM was being spent. It does not square so well with the aspiration to re-shape all the work of the Team within an overarching framework of *Priorities for the Methodist Church.* Also, the mechanisms potentially required (of, for example, internal markets) would be unnecessarily complex.

5.   The second group of three were more radical in that each was intended to express the mutuality of partnership by shifting the centre of gravity for decision-making away from London / 25 Marylebone Road the British connexion.

b.i.   *via the World Methodist Council*

The PMG did not believe this was politically or structurally possible at present.

b.ii   *via regional groupings worldwide (possibly with 'field officers' appointed in each region to act on behalf of the British Church)*

The British Church would become a node rather than the hub in a network of relationships, relating to regional groupings of churches rather than to individual ones. This is potentially attractive and there are already some areas

(Africa, Latin America) where there is some regional co-operation already. But this is not a model that appeals to our partners who value one to one relationships and see problems in devolving decisions about how scarce resources are applied to the regions of the world. There are also issues about reporting and accountability for the British Church.

b.iii   through a European Regional Group (comparable to the present European Commission on Mission - ECOM)

This model would recognise that Britain is part of Europe and would channel FWM resources via ECOM[19] or some very similar body, as part of a European regional response to partnerships with other regions and partner churches. This happens to a limited extent at present but would be difficult to develop because most European Methodist churches are part of the United Methodist Church which is basically an extended national church rooted in the USA. This would introduce an additional level of complexity and negotiation to most relationships rather than improving partnerships.

6.   The final model is minimalist. It would devolve all responsibility for international mission partnerships to other parts of the connexion. Local churches, circuits and districts would simply form whatever partnerships they wished with churches and projects throughout the world and there would be no connexion-wide holding of the ring on behalf of the whole church. Although this would build on the multiplicity of relationships and links that already exist and innumerable personal contacts, the risk of this would be the danger of relying on "who knows who". It would be a kind of "mission tourism" and it could easily mean the smallest and most vulnerable of our current and potential partners were ignored. Again, the PMG did not believe it was consistent with our understanding of connexion and church.[20]

H.   Recommendations

The PMG believes these recommendations flow from the report *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice*[21], from the work of the PMG in reviewing existing work and programmes outlined above and from wide-ranging consultation.

1. SETTING STRATEGY

1.1   The whole of the current Constitution of the Methodist Missionary Society should be reviewed. We recommend that attention should first be given to the present Clause 3 (Purposes).[22]

1.2   The overall strategy for relating to partner churches beyond Britain (international mission relationships) must be set by the Conference and Council. Further work is necessary to clarify how those strategic objectives are arrived at and owned. There is a

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[19]   ECOM is a European-wide Methodist grouping of those with international mission relationship responsibility in the various churches.

[20] Again, see *Partnerships: Purpose and Priorities* passim and section C above.

[21]   See, especially, sections 4 and 5 of *Partnerships: Purpose and Priorities*

[22] This review should build on work already done with the Methodist Church in Ireland. This earlier work was overtaken by the developing *Priorities and Team Focus* processes.

need to agree how the work of 'strategic leaders' in the Team relates to the responsibilities of the FWM Governance Group and the Grants committee.

1.3   We recommend a review of the role of representatives from partner churches in Conference. The importance of their presence needs greater recognition and ways of further empowering them to contribute to the Conference need to be developed. This review should look not only at the status of representatives from partner churches at Conference itself but also at the pre-Conference consultation.

1.4   We recommend that if future proposed ways of working are agreed the pre-Conference Consultation should include consultation with the 'Mission and Ministry in the World Church grants sub committee' and the FWM governance group.

2. DIPLOMACY

2.1   Diplomacy[23] needs to be seen as a priority in terms of maintaining and supporting relationships with partner churches worldwide.

2.2   Ways must be found to give greater significance to Church to Church visits. Visits from British Methodism to be undertaken by 'strategic leaders' and others (eg. CLT, members of Methodist Council, World Methodist Committee) and agreed by the Methodist Council. Ways must also be found to ensure that visits from, for example, heads of partner churches, to the British Church are received and valued by the whole church.

2.3   Support needs to be given to ensuring that those from MCB who make these kind of visits are adequately briefed, resourced and enabled to share the outcomes into policy formation, decision making and advocacy.

3. GRANT MAKING

3.1   Grant making shall be delivered in the scheme devised and outlined by Project 12.

3.2   Consideration needs to be given to how partner churches can be more involved in decision-making and setting objectives which flow to the Grants Committee.

3.3   Grants need to be made in line with an overall strategy (consistent with the purposes of the Fund for World Mission and the checklist in section 4 of *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice*) and then with more focussed targets. These will be led by partner church priorities and by mutual agreement might have a thematic focus on a rolling basis. It will remain important to use grants to support situations of greatest need or opportunity, ('Go not to those who need you …').

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[23] See Section F.1a. and footnote 5 above.

4. FINANCE

4.1 Money transfer should be dealt with appropriately by specialist staff (possibly in the finance department).

4.2 Finance IT systems must generate reports that enable the tracking / processing / monitoring of money transfers and donations.

4.3 Circuits and churches using the transfer service should pay a percentage or a flat fee[24] and the processing should be undertaken as an admin task.

4.4 Authorisation of transfer and any reporting responsibilities may be the responsibility of the grants administrator.

5. LEARNING AND MINISTRIES[25]

5.1 Recruitment and vocational exploration for mission partners, the scholarship and experience exchange programmes, and ongoing personnel functions to be managed by those in the team with responsibility for Learning and Ministries with support from Personnel.

5.2 Learning and Ministries should take on more responsibility for lay formation and the encouragement of vocational exploration in world mission than currently occurs.

5.3 All those training for ordained ministry will be expected to have some formational experiences of the life of a partner church beyond Britain.

5.4 The work undertaken in developing *Partnerships: Purpose and Practice* raises the question whether sending and receiving mission partners, the scholarship programme and the Experience Exchange and Mission Live programmes should continue. The recommendation is that this work is reviewed.

5.5 This review will need to be undertaken in conjunction with a review and decisions about the future of the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies, (SOCMS).

5.6 We recommend that the Formation in World Mission programme be continued for the time being and is reviewed alongside 5.4 and 5.5 above.

6. ADVOCACY

6.1 We support the integrated approach to advocacy as outlined in the project 4 proposals.

6.2 There are essential links and opportunities for advocacy arising from the presence of representatives of partner churches at Conference. We therefore

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[24] Work needs to be done before deciding which of these would be a better method.

[25] This is the provisional name for the responsibilities of one of the 'green' senior managers in the reconfigured Team.

recommend that there should be a meeting of the World Mission Forum immediately after Conference to which the representatives of partner churches present at the Conference should be invited.

7. NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

7.1 Consideration needs to be given to working within existing networks and developing new networks to support international mission relationships. Networks need to be able to tap into the wealth of human resource and experience present throughout the connexion.

8. STRUCTURE

8.1 The International Mission Relationships / World Mission Group in the team would be placed under the Christian Communication and Advocacy heading.

8.2 There should be an International Mission Relationships / World Mission Co-ordinator
   a. to manage policy development
   b. to liaise on International mission relationships / world mission issues with other parts of the Team.
   c. To provide some support to the work outlined in 8.3 a.
   d. Trouble shooting

8.3 There should be two new kinds of officers:
   a. responsible for overseeing visits and 'diplomacy'.
   b. providing development support for partners seeking grant support.
   These posts would replace the existing area secretaries recognising that several functions (e.g. grant making, money transfer) will be transferred to other areas. The new postholders would make fewer visits as it is envisaged that most of these will be made by those outlined in Recommendations 2 above (Diplomacy).

8.4 Europe raises some particular issues because the British Church is a European Church. The work currently undertaken by the Europe Secretary in the World Church Office includes significant links with public issues and ecumenical work. These are being assessed through the filter process. Our recommendation is that these aspects of the work should be held elsewhere in the team.

8.5 There will be fewer backup staff required in this new structure but they would need to be able to work across a variety of tasks. Language skills may continue to be important.

8.6 In line with recommendations of Project 12 world mission grants administration should be under the line management of the Resources for Mission 'green' (cf. 4.4 Finance).

9. Conclusion

In making these recommendations the PMG fully recognises the quality of the work done by the current WCO and its predecessors. It also strongly affirms its conviction that the British Methodist Church should continue to sustain and develop its historic involvement in global mission. The PMG is convinced that its recommendations, taken together, will make for more effective and appropriate ways of working in today's world. They are intended to win wide ownership and to reclaim commitment to global mission for the whole connexion. They are a practical outworking of one aspect of the overarching Priority of the Methodist Church in Britain to renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church and to play its part, alongside all its partner churches, in proclaiming and affirming its conviction of God's love in Christ.

Appendix 1
CONSTITUTION OF THE METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY (clauses 1-3)

1 The Society and the Methodist Church.

From the beginning of Methodist overseas mission at the Conference of 1786 the initiation, direction and support of overseas mission have been undertaken by the Conferences of the Methodist Churches in Britain and Ireland, and all members of those churches have been regarded as called to share in the mission of the whole Church to offer Christ to every person in word, deed and corporate life.

2 Membership.

The Methodist Missionary Society is none other than the Methodist Church itself sharing in world mission; the members of the Methodist Missionary Society are the members of the Methodist Church in Great Britain and every member of that church is as such a member of the Methodist Missionary Society.

3 Purposes.

The purposes of the Missionary Society are:

(i)　　to initiate, maintain and encourage Christian mission in other countries;

(ii)　　*to encourage the establishment of Churches overseas which will themselves undertake that mission both within and beyond their own borders;*

(iii)　　*to engage in a continuing relationship of mutual help and enrichment with churches (including united churches) in the life of which Methodist missions have played a part;*

(iv)　　*to foster and take part in ecumenical relationships in the field of world mission, including the work of the World Council of Churches and the Churches' Commission on Mission;*

(ivA)　to bear witness to the global character of Christian mission by supporting work with and among ethnic minority communities in Britain and Ireland which have had their origin in other countries;

(v)　　in furtherance of these purposes to engage in education, advocacy, recruitment and fund-raising.

The Methodist Fund for World Mission is to be applied for these purposes (S.O. 361(2)).

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Appendix 2
Bodies and Other Areas of the Team Which Contribute to Maintaining and Developing International Mission Relationships and Partnerships

Groups involved in WCO accountability:

1. General Accountability and Management
   a. Senior Staff Meeting
   b. World Mission Group
   c. Methodist Council

2. (Sub-)Committees etc. for particular World Church Programmes:
   a. Scholarship Subcommittee
   b. World Church in Britain Committee
   c. Formation in World Mission Group
   d. NMA Group
   e. Overseas Service Sub-Committee

Other groups/entities with a formal interest in International Mission Relationships:

3. Methodist Missionary Society

   Methodist Missionary Society (Ireland)

Groups/Individuals with a representative role on behalf of MCB:

4. World Methodist Committee (WMC)

5. Representatives to Autonomous Conferences

6. Representatives to the World Council of Churches

Groups relating to European Methodism:

7. Representatives to European Methodist Council

8. Representatives to Conference of European Churches

9. Community of Protestant Churches (Leuenberg Fellowship)

Team Interests (Major):

10. Women's Network (Easter Offering, projects, grants etc.)

11. Youth and Community - World Action (WA Management group)

12. Methodist Children – JMA

13. Wesley Guild

14. Prayer handbook committee (if it still exists!)

Interest Groups:

Methodists for World Mission