

# CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

- resources  
for  
growth

September 2003

## “And I've brought a casserole!”

- key findings about Methodists from the Church Life Profile

“Three Christians, a Roman Catholic, a Baptist and a Methodist, arrived at the pearly gates of heaven, to be accosted by St Peter. 'And what have you brought with you?' Peter asked. 'I've brought my rosary,' said the Roman Catholic. 'Very good,' replied Peter, 'in you go. And what about you?' 'Well I've got my Bible with me,' the Baptist said. 'Fine, on your way.' The Methodist meanwhile lifted up the tea towel on top of the object she was carrying and smiled: 'And I've brought a casserole!’”

*Clive Marsh (Faith and Order Committee Secretary), Christianity in a Post-Atheist Age (SCM, 2002)*

We now know that the stereotyped Methodist of this joke is alive and well and easily detected by the major **Church Life Profile** that was conducted in the late spring of 2001. It was a massive survey, involving 108,000 churchgoers, of whom 29,000 were Methodists. That's **10%** of Methodists. This is a huge sample (most public opinion polls only survey 1,-2,000 people). The margin of error in the results is low, and statistical significance high. Your church may not look exactly like the picture of Methodism that has emerged. But it is likely to be a true picture overall.

Loyal, caring, sociable, eucharistic - in this respect, Methodists emerge as true followers of Jesus. In the Gospels he is often shown eating and drinking with all



*Betty Smith dishes up at Diss Methodist Church.*

types of people. Sharing table fellowship, being realistic and friendly about social and bodily needs, remains key to welcoming people into the Christian community today. However, other parts of the picture are not so rosy. It's not clear that we share Jesus' emphasis on prayer, articulating our faith, or awareness of the presence of God.

The survey findings are interesting because they compare Methodists with those of other denominations (so we can't just blame the problems of modern culture). Your church may have taken part and received its own findings. But every church can look honestly at itself and see what parts of the picture fit. When we make members, what kind of church are we asking them to join?

## Some responses



*“There is much to affirm and celebrate. There is however no room for complacency. There are huge challenges before us. Are our churches structured for preservation or mission? Do we have a clear sense of purpose? This survey is a timely wake-up call for the whole Church to discern God’s preferred future for us.”*

Peter A Brown, *circuit minister*



*“Twenty-first century Methodists can no longer be satisfied with moderation in all things, we must urgently rediscover our passion for spirit-led preaching, prayer and evangelism.”*

Karen George, *probationer minister*

Both Peter and Karen are members of the Discipleship and Church Membership Task Group. Let us know your responses to the survey (see back page for contact details).

# Methodist Church

**W**hen all the Methodists results were brought together and compared with the results from the other Churches, a particular picture emerged. Do you recognise it?

Overall, the impression is of ‘moderation’. Methodists were less likely than others to tick the box on either end of the extreme. When asked to indicate which two labels best described their approach to faith, Methodists were most likely (24%) to indicate that they did not identify with any on the list. Next most likely to be ticked were the words “evangelical” (18%) and “moderate” (17%).

### Loyal

Methodists showed exceptional loyalty to their church. Many had been coming for over 20 years. There were fewer 'switchers' than in other denominations. Two-thirds of those who took part said that their denomination was an important framework in shaping their faith.

### Sociable

Methodists were more likely than others to see themselves as welcoming to newcomers. They were more likely to be part of a social group, and saw social activities as more important than other Churches did.

### Involved in church life

Only one in four Methodists did not have a specific named role in the local church, and they were more likely to be involved in decision-making committees than those of other Churches.

### Caring

Twice as many Methodists (22%) reported that they were involved in pastoral care activities as those in other Churches (11%). Pastoral care

is a quality that Methodists valued highly in their minister, placing it above teaching.

### Community-minded

Methodists were somewhat more likely than those of other Churches to be involved in community service and in lobbying groups outside the Church.

### Eucharistic

Methodists, interestingly, valued Holy Communion rather more highly than did other Churches (though it was highest on the list for everyone).

### Fairly satisfied with church

As with other Churches, more than 80% of Methodists agreed that “my spiritual needs are being met through this local church”. Methodists were more likely just to 'agree' than 'strongly agree'.

### Mostly female

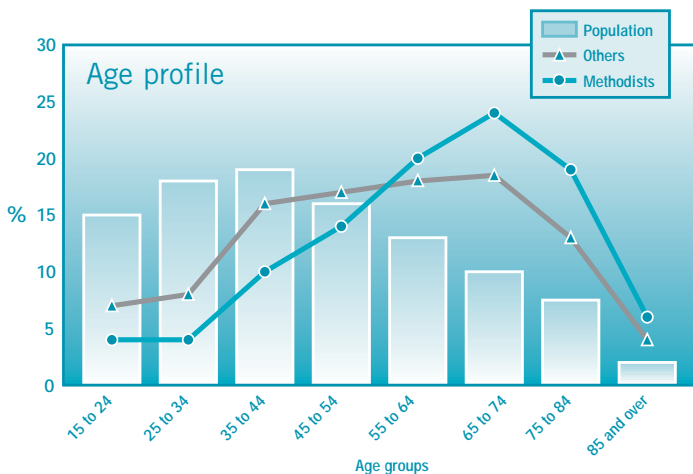
It's a fact that more women than men go to Church, but it's even truer of Methodism. 69% are female - in other Churches the figure is 65%.

# h Life Profile



## Mostly elderly

Methodism has succeeded brilliantly in retaining the loyalty of the oldest generation, but is much less successful at attracting or retaining younger age groups. The general church-going demography is quite different from the general population, being weighted towards the upper end. The Methodist population peaks between 65 and 74. People in Methodist churches were less likely (48%) than others (59%) to have retained their children over 12 years as continuing church attenders.



## Not that impressed with preaching

The findings here were strange. On the one hand, Methodists were most likely to say that the Bible is the word of God “to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the Church's teaching”. On the other, Methodists were less likely than others to agree strongly that “the preaching I hear in this local church is usually very helpful to me in my everyday life”.

## Not very conscious of God's presence

Methodists were significantly less likely to report that attending worship gave them a sense of awe, mystery, or a sense of God's presence. This was in spite of being more likely (16%) than other denominations (11%) to value 'traditional worship'. They were also more likely (27%/22%) to admit that God does not have prime importance in their lives.

## Not very keen on prayer groups

Methodists were three times as likely to attend a social group (38%) as one devoted to prayer or study (11%).

Members of other Churches were almost twice as likely as Methodists to say they attended a prayer or study group (22%).

## Not aware of vision in the Church.

Methodists were much more likely than others to indicate that their church had “ideas but no clear vision”. Where they agreed that their church did have vision, they were less likely than others to indicate that they personally were strongly committed to such vision.

## Reluctant to talk about faith.

Although the same proportion of people across the Churches (about a quarter) indicated they found talking about faith hard, significantly fewer Methodists (9%) than others (13%) said there were prepared to seek opportunities to do so. Also, more Methodists (16%) than others (11%) agreed with the statement “I do not like to talk about my faith - my life and actions are sufficient.”

## Notes

- Because of the huge size of the sample, differences of even a few percentage points are significant and should not be dismissed.
- In the 'age profile' diagram, the population figures are from the 1991 census. There is some shift towards an older population now.
- The findings described here are summaries of work by Philip Escott and Alison Gelder, published by Churches Information for Mission 2002.
- The full report can be downloaded from the Methodist website at [www.methodist.org.uk/information/resources.htm](http://www.methodist.org.uk/information/resources.htm)

## Questions for discussion

- **What do you find most encouraging in the findings?**
- **What do you find most concerning?**
- **Can you recognise your church? Or how is your church different?**
- **Why would people want to become or stay members of your church?**

For help with church review processes such as *Pilgrim's Way* or *Know and Grow*, contact the Development Officer for Local Mission and Unity, 0161 236 5194 or [admin@lmdo.methodist.org.uk](mailto:admin@lmdo.methodist.org.uk) or Graham Horsley, Secretary for Evangelism and Church Planting, 020 7467 5243, or [horsleyg@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:horsleyg@methodistchurch.org.uk)

Since its publication in August 2002, *Called by Name* has sold over 14,000 copies. It has been widely reviewed and extremely favourably received. Earlier this year we contacted all superintendents to discover how they were using the book. This is what they told us:

### Who has received copies?

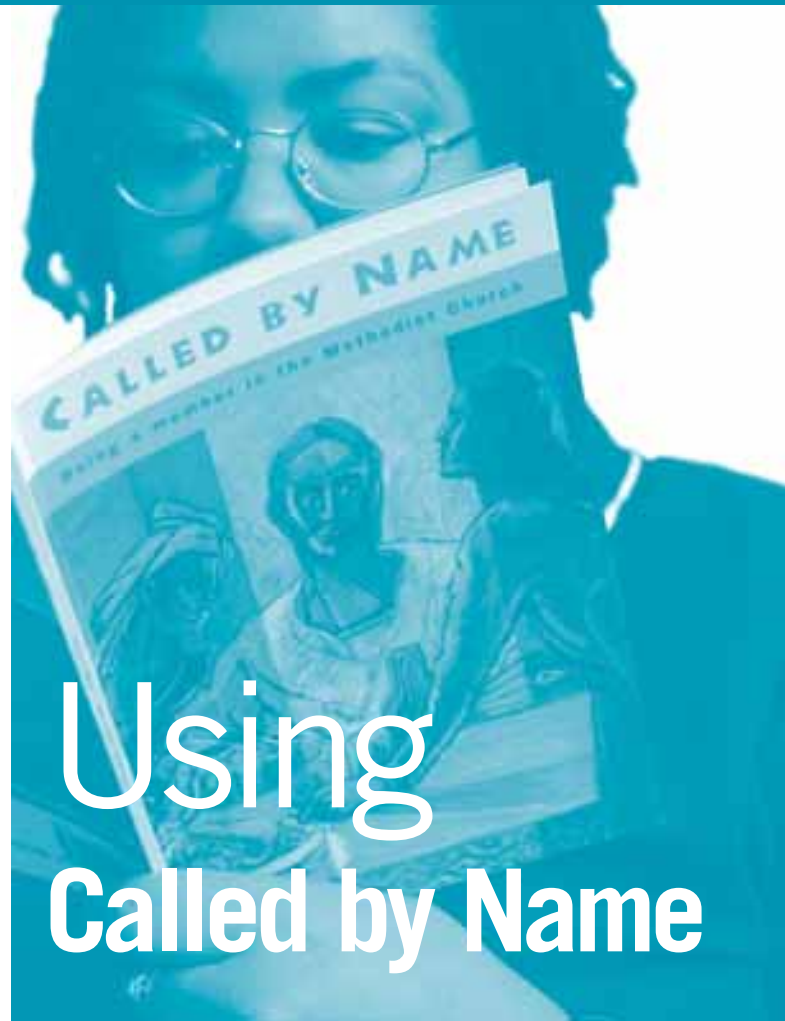
- Confirmation candidates, transfers, enquirers, recent church attenders
- Each person at the final session of an *Alpha* course
- Existing church members - one church council gave a copy to every member as a Christmas present!
- Wedding couples – one couple contacted their minister after the wedding and asked to become members!
- One London woman appeared at her church, brandishing the book and asking for membership training.
- A 12 year old wrote saying that it really influenced her to become a member of the Methodist Church.

### What do you think of the book?

- “It is good to give people a book that is attractive and which presents the church in a positive yet realistic light.”
- “It’s something that I can hand out to people ... without feeling embarrassed about quality and content.”
- “It shows that belonging to the Church is something to be both valued and treasured.”
- “This is [its] real strength – it can be used in many ways, at different ‘levels’ and at all stages of our Christian journey.”

### Using *Called by Name* in membership preparation groups

- Look at the visual images to stimulate discussion about what faith means, by asking each person to choose their favourite image and say why it is meaningful.
- Read the Bible passages and hymns on each page and then relate them to people’s experience of finding faith today.
- Each person reads a couple of pages before the group meeting, which then uses them as a springboard for discussion. (This was done with one group of 16-17 year olds, who were so enthused by the book that they started telling their school friends.)



### Using the book in other ways

- Long-standing members have looked at *Called by Name* in a house group and discovered things they had not known about Methodism.
- A youth drama group have taken sections as a springboard to talk about their faith.
- *Flame* has used material and based activities around it – eg: session on John Wesley (May/June 2003), ‘Applying our faith’ (March/April 2002). Back issues are available from Methodist Publishing House (tel: 01733 325002).
- Take one of the double-page spreads as a starting point, and using the hymns and Bible readings there, prepare an act of worship. A number of them could easily form a series, with the Gerald Markland’s chorus, ‘Do not be afraid’ (MPC 115) being used as a common thread.

**We want to find out how you are using *Called by Name* in your church so that we can tell others. Please write and let us know what you are doing (contact details are on the back page).**



# Order Form

## Called by Name – being a member in the Methodist Church

### Cheaper to order in bulk

The book is priced at £3.50 but there is a particularly attractive rate for ordering in bulk (5 copies or more are £2.75 each). This is because we hope you will give a copy away to anyone who might be considering membership, but why not order some for your church bookstall as well? If you want to see a copy before you commit to a bulk order, your superintendent minister will have received a specimen copy to show around.

	Qty	Cost
<b>Called by Name</b>		
Single copy @ £3.50 (PA209)		
5 copies or more @ £2.75 (PA809)		
<b>Membership Tickets</b>		
<b>English</b> (PA230) Sold in packets of 50 @ £6.00		
<b>Welsh</b> (PA935) Sold in packets of 50 @ £6.00		
<b>Large print English</b> (PA228) Sold in packets of 50 @ £6.00		
<b>Essence</b> @ £19.99 (PA283)		
<b>Make a journey of faith</b> - a 'first contact' leaflet (PA183)		Free
UK postage and packing (£1.50 for order £5.00 £3.00 for order over £5.00)		
<b>Total</b>		

Make cheques payable to 'Methodist Publishing House'.  
Credit and debit cards welcome.

Card type.....

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Issue number (Switch only)

Name.....

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Postcode.....

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Please return to Methodist Publishing House,  
4 John Wesley Road, Werrington, Peterborough PE4 6ZP  
Or Tel: 01733 325002 Fax: 01733 384180  
E-mail: sales@mph.org.uk

# Resources

## Rediscovering the Vision

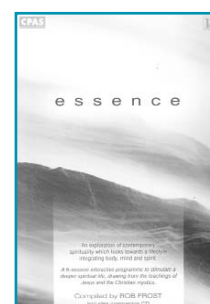
*Rediscovering the Vision* is for small groups to explore John Wesley's original vision for Methodism and how it can still impact on the Church today. The material is designed for seven sessions and comprises a video (with a 15 minute talking-head input for each session) and accompanying booklet with questions.

*Copies are available from Chris Jones, 120 Waterhouse Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2QT, costing £10.00 for the video and a booklet. Additional booklets are 50p each. (Cheques should be made payable to 'RYO Resources').*

## Essence

Here is a six session exploration of contemporary spirituality. As well as creating a space for those who are searching, *Essence* addresses a need amongst many committed Christians for something less cerebral and more experiential in their faith. Packed with creativity, using music, meditations and group activities as well as discussion material, it is participatory and interactive throughout. The material includes detailed notes for leaders and an accompanying CD of music, meditations and readings.

*Essence is available from MPH (see coupon opposite).*



## Journey

Journey describes itself as a route of discovery rather than a course for those who want a way into Christianity based on the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, and upon discipleship in the kingdom of God. There is various resource material including a book (£6.00), a participant's diary (£2.00) and a group leader's guide (£1.00). There are also suggestions for activities, places to visit and people to meet as a way of discovering more.

*For more information contact Ashram Press, 178 Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield S4 7AY or log on to: [www.journeycourse.org.uk](http://www.journeycourse.org.uk)*

## Membership Ticket



# Events

## Shapes of future church?

5 – 9 January 2004, Cliff College

### What is the Church? Where is it going?

Through keynote addresses, common interest discussion groups and seminars, this conference looks at new expressions of being Church. It is designed for anyone who loves the Church, but knows that things cannot, and must not, go on as they are.

For more details and a booking form contact Cliff College, Calver, Hope Valley S32 3XG (tel: 01246 582321).

## The Word @ Whitby Methodists making sense of the Bible today

30 April – 3 May 2004,  
Sneaton Castle Centre, Whitby

“The Methodist Church acknowledges the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith and practice.” (*A lamp to my feet*, Conference 1998)

Yet many Methodists today may be vague about the Bible, unfamiliar with it, and unsure about how to interpret it. How have we managed to make the Bible – that complex, challenging, problematic, passionate set of texts – actually boring? How does it become the Word of God to the Church of today? This conference,

which is sponsored by the new President and Vice-President of Conference, Neil Richardson and Judy Jarvis, will explore a wide range of new creative, stimulating approaches to opening up the Bible. Speakers include Prof James D G Dunn, Prof Judith Lieu, Dr Anthony Reddie, Dr Nicola Slee and Revd Dr Martyn Atkins.

The Conference is aimed at those who have a role in helping others to get to grips with the Bible – local preachers, ministers, deacons, lay workers, tutors and trainers, evangelists, house group leaders, workers with children and young people and worship leaders.

*Cost: £90 - £135 (full board), non-residential rates also available. For more details and a booking form contact Cecilia Okrafo-Smart 020 7467 5174 (e-mail: okrafo-smartc@methodistchurch.org.uk)*

## FAQs about membership

**I am a student and want to feel I'm really part of both the churches I attend - at college and at home. Why can't I have my membership in both places?**

You are a full member of the Methodist Church across the Connexion so long as your membership is held in one local church, and there is no reason why you shouldn't take a full part in the life of another church which you also attend. You can even hold most offices, for instance, local preachers who are members in one circuit can study and preach in another circuit where they live for part of the time, with the agreement of the Superintendents. If you don't feel you've been included and taken seriously in either place, talk to the minister you know best and ask him/her to communicate with the other.

**Some of my congregation come from other Church traditions. I would like to invite them to become members but I sense that they would not want to 'give up' the tradition that has nurtured them in the past.**

Conference 2000 introduced 'extended membership' for people in this position. This means that they may become Methodist members while remaining in membership of another Christian communion. (This is not limited to people in a Local Ecumenical Partnership.) Conference 2003 adopted a set of guidance notes to help local churches receive people in this situation into membership. These will be printed in the Guidance section of CPD.



### Further Information

Please contact Adult Learning, Methodist Church House,  
25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR. Tel: 020 7467 5173/1  
Fax: 020 7486 7792 E-mail: morleyj@methodistchurch.org.uk

This insert is free. **Further copies** are available at £2.20 per 10 copies as a contribution towards the distribution cost from MPH (see address below)

This is part of the Connexional Link Mailing, provided for the Methodist Church in Britain. Methodist Churches and others in linked ecumenical projects may freely copy this resource for their own use.

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### Who has been sent copies direct?

Ministers and Deacons in pastoral charge

### Who else in your church might find this useful?

- .....
- .....
- .....

Please write their names and get them to tick the box when they have seen or received a copy.