

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

September 2004

- in what shape of Church?

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

**‘The Lord hath yet more light and truth
to break forth from his Word!’**

This was the chorus to a rousing hymn that opened the event *The Word @ Whitby - Methodists making sense of the Bible today* over the May Day Bank holiday this year. Methodists from across the Connexion found a huge sense of excitement and a hunger for new learning as they participated in a wide variety of academic and participatory approaches to the Bible. Most were astonished by the range and creativity they experienced, and went home with a version of the question one participant put like this: “How can we find a new term (given that ‘Bible Study’ is a turn-off), that would ‘bottle’ the kind of thing we’ve been up to, and make it come alive in a local church setting?”

Recently, many churches have been grappling with the question of what it will take to become the place where Christian disciples can really grow in confidence and share this kind of infectious enthusiasm. In the Methodist Church, the General Secretary the Revd David Deeks has been having in-depth conversations around all the districts of the Connexion, asking, under the banner of *Our Calling*, ‘Where are we heading?’ As a result, Conference has adopted the ‘Priorities’ overleaf. But we are not alone.



The worship centre at Whitby featured Roy de Maistre's image of the supper at Emmaus, along with an open Bible. Right from the beginning, Jesus' disciples have found their expectations overturned (and their hearts set on fire) when they walk in company with Jesus and engage passionately with the Scriptures. The same can be true for us.

In partner denominations, a similar heart-searching about the need for change has been going on. The United Reformed Church at its Assembly in July adopted a report called *'Catching the Vision'*, and in the Church of England over the past decade there have been a range of publications and initiatives, supported by the Archbishops, that explore what are the features of a 'healthy church'.

Our Calling

The Methodist Church

The Church exists to:

WORSHIP

Increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love

SERVICE

Become a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice

LEARNING & CARING

Help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support and care

EVANGELISM

Make more followers of Jesus Christ



Priorities for the Methodist 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:

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

Adopted by Conference 2004

Conference quotes about 'Priorities'

"I'm chuffed to pieces that these insights have come from the bottom up."

Revd Mark Hammond

"We've been waiting some time for this kind of lead."

Revd Paul Wilson

"By far the most important issue we shall be discussing this week."

Roger Dawe

"This report is exciting; it warms my heart."

Margaret Parker

"By God's spirit, we are expressing priorities I would be proud to put up on a poster."

Revd Bill Anderson

Discipleship is key

'We need to work creatively to:

- ◆ bring the Bible alive to ourselves and to our contemporary world;
- ◆ provide safe and loving places in which to share honestly the deepest concerns and questions of our lives ...;
- ◆ develop renewed confidence in connecting faith with work and everyday life.'

Quoted in 'Priorities' as an account of a Methodist Council discussion.

For the full text of 'Priorities of the Methodist Church':

- go to www.methodist.org.uk and look at News and Conference Reports;
- order 'Over to You' (PA 269) from Methodist Publishing House (see back page).

Catch the Vision

United Reformed Church

In the report, the church's response was summed up in the form of a prayer:

May the Spirit of the Lord rest upon us,
may the call of God sustain us,
as we seek to be Christ's people,
transformed by the gospel,
announcing good news to the poor,
proclaiming freedom for those in prisons of
wealth, poverty, disease and disorder,
committed to making a difference
to the world's kingdoms
as we live Christ's kingdom.

May we deploy our resources as the Spirit guides,
not shirk difficult decisions about the priorities of
mission,
pledge ourselves anew to work with all our fellow
Christians
and use the gifts of all God's people
so that all may be filled with the Spirit of healing,
justice and peace.

For the complete text of 'Catch the Vision', go to:
www.urc.org.uk.

Quotes from the General Assembly

"God is God of the margins."

*"Living on the margins is forcing the churches to
experiment ... to discover new ways of being church."*

*"Mission is not a burden laid upon the Church; it is a
gift and a promise to the Church that is faithful."*

Lesslie Newbigin, quoted by David Cornick.

*"Let us take the Gospel to where people are; let us
do what we can and do it well."*

Revd Fleur Houston

***"God's people are disciples, called to
participate in God's mission in their
own particular space and time. We
detect a yearning for a renewal of
spirituality and discipleship at the
heart of the Church."***

Quoted in 'Catch the Vision'.



**"We are called to be
Church in God's
tomorrow. We will
not be there alone."**

Revd Dr David Cornick introduces 'Catch the Vision' at the URC General Assembly, July 2004.

Over the last two years, a Steering Group set up by the URC Mission Council has worked on the remit they were given '...urgently and radically to re-think the Church's priorities, programmes and processes'. A pastoral letter and questionnaire were sent to ministers and churches outlining the following questions, and a huge response was received. Members of the United Reformed Church overwhelmingly 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the following:

- **In practical terms, to remain where we are is not an option.**
- **It is our goal to become a vibrant and sustainable faith community in the next ten years.**
- **We are called by God to be a Church which is centred upon the gospel and the proclamation of its message of freedom and justice.**
- **We are called to be diverse and lively, inclusive and flexible.**
- **We will seek, visibly and recognisably, to make a difference to our communities and our society, in the name of Jesus Christ.**
- **Achieving our goal will require sacrifices and pruning.**
- **We will become less bureaucratic.**
- **We will become more ecumenically focused.**
- **We will become more reliant on lay leadership.**

7 Marks of a Healthy Church

Many parts of our Covenant partner, the Church of England, have found help from research undertaken during the Decade of Evangelism on what makes for a healthy mission-shaped church. The following is an edited version available full in *The Healthy Churches Handbook*.

For details go to: www.chpublishing.co.uk/healthychurches

1 Energised by faith

rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive

- moving worship and sacramental life
motivation - desire to serve God
- engaging with scripture in creative ways
- nurturing faith in Christ

2 Outward-looking focus

with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern

- deeply rooted in local community
- passionate and prophetic about justice and peace
- connecting faith and daily living
- loving service for human need

3 Seeks to find out what God wants

discerning the Spirit's leading rather than trying to please everyone

- vocation - open to the Spirit
- vision
- mission priorities - setting goals
- accepting sacrifices

4 Faces the cost of change and growth

rather than resisting change and avoiding failure

- new ways of working
- taking risks
- responding creatively to challenges
- building on positive experiences of change

5 Builds community

rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation

- relationships nurtured through small groups
- leadership - working as a team
- lay ministry - valuing different gifts

6 Makes room for others

being inclusive rather than exclusive welcome for newcomers

- children and young people helped to contribute
- enquirers encouraged to explore
- diversities seen as a strength

7 Does a few things — and does them well

focused rather than frenetic

- doing the basics well
- occasional offices (Baptisms, weddings and funerals) communicate faith
- being good news as a church in our ways of working
- enjoying what we do

The Archbishop on Discipleship

"I'm going to be rude about 'religion'. Some people are 'religious'. It's an exercise done in leisure time, that hangs around the edge of what matters. However, being 'biblical' means that the whole of life stands under the judgement of God, under the hand of God."



Archbishop Rowan Williams was the guest of the new President, Will Morrey, at Conference in June. He spoke and answered questions on the theme **'What is essential in the life of the Church?'**

Ideas for discussion in your church

Before you plan the discussion, consider:

Is there anyone else you could be having the discussion with (eg: local Anglican and/or United Reformed Church)?

Discussion

- **Looking at all three statements, what themes are there in common?**
- **What do you find most exciting or inspiring?**
- **Is there anything that you don't understand, or feel put off by?**
- **What theme has the most resonance and relevance for your church?** (*Answer this privately as individuals and then see whether you agree as a group.*)
- **Take the theme that most people think is most relevant for your church and discuss it in more detail:**



An exercise in imagination

- **Imagine it is ten years in the future and your church has in fact succeeded in fulfilling its vision in this area. What is happening in your church life?** (*Describe all aspects you can think of - it may help to record these on a large sheet of paper.*)
- **Now stand back and try to explain what things had to happen, in order that these things could come about?** (*Decisions, changes, finance, etc.*)
- **So, what is your first next step as a church in setting out on that path?**

To get help or find out more contact your **District Evangelism Enabler** (contact **Ashley Cooper** on **01782 786526**), or your **Training and Development Officer** (contact **Cecilia Okrafo-Smart** on **0207 467 5174**).

Releasing money for mission

At present, about £70 million is being held in Methodist Circuit Advance Funds, generated through the sale of property. Decisions made at Conference 2004 will soon make it easier for extra money to be released for ministry projects. For example, it was agreed that all circuits will be able, from September 2005, to withdraw up to £10,000 annually (they will not be limited just to the interest on capital) from the Circuit Advance Fund for any Methodist purpose. This change and others will be confirmed through new Standing Orders, to be brought to Conference 2005.

For more details, see **Property Points part 2, 2004** or contact: secretaries@property.methodist.org.uk, or ring the **Resourcing Mission Office (0161 236 5194)**.

Good news about new members!

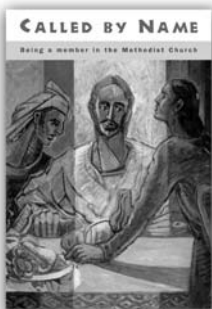
Latest 2003 statistics show that the number of new members made went UP by 18% on the previous year! Although overall numbers of members still declined (through deaths and transfers out), this shows that there is an interest in making a commitment through membership. Your superintendent has received a report on statistics kept, with guidance about using them for mission purposes locally.

Resources

Called by Name

being a member in the Methodist Church

mph, (PA 209) £3.50 or £2.75 each for 5 or more copies (PA 809)



This beautiful and inspiring small book is ideal to give to those who are considering church membership – but existing members and enquirers such as wedding couples have also responded enthusiastically. Highly visual, it has proved to be a bestseller with churches.

Come as you are

Brenda Woods, mph, (PA 158) £16.95.

This attractive and easy-to-use ten session programme for group study invites those with some knowledge of the basics of Christianity to consider



afresh or perhaps for the first time what it means to be a disciple. It can also be used for preparing people for membership in the Methodist Church

Healthy Churches' Handbook

Robert Warren, Church House Publishing, £10.95.

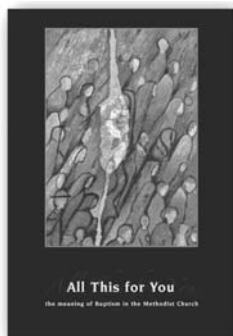
This practical guide helps churches identify their strengths and weaknesses and discover what action to take in order to develop the health of their church. The focus is on the *quality* of the church's life rather than just the numbers attending.

See www.chpublishing.co.uk.

All This For You

the meaning of Baptism in the Methodist Church

mph, (PA 186) £3.50 or £2.75 each for 5 or more copies (PA 885).



Similar in format to *Called by Name*, *All This for You* is perfect for anyone considering Baptism for themselves or their child. Using vivid images and thoughtful text, it opens up the depths of meaning contained in the signs and symbols of the Baptism Service. Deceptively easy to read for those not familiar with 'churchy' language.

Mission-shaped Church

Church House Publishing, £10.95

Produced by a working group of the Church of England, this practical and inspiring book will resonate with local Methodist churches. It looks candidly at where lessons can be learned about church planting, and it describes varied and exciting 'fresh expressions' of church in a changing context.



See www.chpublishing.co.uk.

Pilgrims Way

mph (XA 240), £4.00.

Now available direct from mph, Pilgrims Way aims to get your church on the move again – but at a pace of your choosing. Reflecting on your church and the local community, it could lead to a quite different style of church life. Best undertaken with a 'partner' to guide you through the process. For further information contact Chris Sissons or William Swires (0161 236 5194).



Shaping the Future

mph (XA 282), £2.00

A new resource from the Resourcing Mission Office, *Shaping the Future* offers a process for reviewing the work of your circuit against the background of available resources and cultural changes, and for planning appropriate action. It is designed to supplement the *Our Calling* process and takes for granted that all circuit policy is concerned with worship and mission.



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

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Ministers and Deacons in pastoral charge

Who else in your church might find this useful?

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

