If so, maybe you are called to pioneer mission:

sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed with those who currently have little or no connection to the Christian story, to Jesus Christ or to the Church

making disciples of Jesus and forming new Christian community which is appropriate to the culture and context.

In developing the VentureFX scheme, we have identified some of the qualities pioneers are likely to need. The following list may be helpful for you in either exploring a call to pioneering or looking to appoint a pioneer.

1. **Visionary**
   A pioneer has the ability to see possibilities which others often may not recognise. Pioneers will seek to discern what God is doing and shape their work and aims accordingly so that they can pursue a God-given vision. They must be willing to adopt an approach which involves ‘holy risk’, and will naturally begin with people and community rather than taking church as their starting point. They are people who are able to think outside the box; who can share vision effectively and who can inspire and encourage others to be visionary.

2. **Team builder and leader**
   Pioneers should be capable not only of taking a lead in starting up new Christian communities and activities, but also able to inspire and encourage others to share in those tasks with them. Pioneers will be able to lead a team as well as to function as part of a team, and be an asset to the teams to which they belong. Pioneers will be able to help others to discern their gifts and offer them suitable encouragement and training so that those gifts can be appropriately used as part of a team.
3. **Collaborator**

Pioneers are able to share their vision with others and to collaborate as a natural way of working. They will help others to feel a sense of ownership of the project and to feel valued as their contribution and skills are drawn in to its development. They will routinely consult with and involve those in the local Church community and the wider community, and will work ecumenically wherever possible. They will share experience with others involved with fresh expressions work locally and beyond.

4. **Relationship builder**

Pioneers need to have excellent inter-personal skills. They should be able to form open and healthy relationships with others, and to encourage others to form good relationships as well. They will naturally seek to get to know others personally and to build relationships of integrity and trust, acknowledging and respecting appropriate boundaries. They will have a godly love and compassion toward others, and will seek to respond to their expressed needs and concerns.

5. **Initiator**

A pioneer should have the capacity to be a self-starter; intrinsically motivated, and able to initiate a project or community of people, often building from nothing. Pioneers are highly motivated, have qualities of persistence and commitment and are able to see a project come to birth despite obstacles and setbacks. They are creative, innovative and imaginative, and have the ability to be reflective about their work. They can plan strategically and manage the process of beginning a project from scratch.

6. **Understanding of mission contexts**

Pioneers are good at listening, observing, coming alongside and loving people in different cultures. They have a developed perception of the issues involved in understanding and relating to the cultural context of the community where they minister. They will have a good knowledge of the worldviews of those living in a postmodern and post-Christendom society, and will have the skills to engage effectively in sharing Christian faith with them. They will have an awareness of the challenge of reaching people who have little understanding of the Christian story or the life of the Church.

7. **Evangelist**

Pioneers seek through appropriate and sensitive evangelism to share the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ in order that others may grow into a mature and authentic Christian lifestyle. Therefore, pioneers need the ability to share Christian faith in a way that makes sense to non-churched people, and is relevant to their everyday experience. Pioneers will recognise that the good news has both personal and social implications, and that God has a special concern for justice and thus for disadvantaged and marginalised people, and they will seek to share a whole gospel. It will usually be obvious that they are already engaged in evangelism and service to those outside the Church.

8. **Flexibility and adaptability**

Circumstances have a habit of changing and things often go in unexpected directions! Pioneers will be able to determine and pursue aims and priorities, but they will also be able to refine and amend these in the light of experience and changing circumstances. They will be able to cope effectively with ambiguity and with constant – sometimes abrupt – change. They will be able to adapt their understanding, experience and methodology to the uniqueness of the fresh expression of Church they are attempting to establish.

9. **Building an ecclesial community**

Pioneers need to have a developed understanding of the nature of Church and to understand the principles which will enable them to establish a form of Church for those who do not normally attend any, with the hope that in time, it will reach maturity as an ecclesial community and will bear the enduring marks of Church. They will be sensitive to the need for the community they establish to be shaped in a way which
is appropriate for its context, and which may be very different from a typical Methodist church, yet remains recognisably ‘in connexion’ with the wider Methodist community, seeking appropriate ways to partner with other Churches in mission and worship.

10. Robustness and tenacity
The nature of pioneer ministry is challenging and can be tough on people. Pioneers and their families need to be confident that, with God’s help, they are able to cope with those pressures. They will demonstrate an ability to cope with disappointments and setbacks (and, sometimes, a sense of loneliness) and to be persistent in the face of difficulty. They will have an awareness of the limits of their own resources and be able to maintain a sense of balance in their lives.

11. Faith and Spirituality
Potential pioneers will believe in God’s action in the world and will recognise that establishing a fresh expression of Church is a venture of faith. They will sense that offering for this form of ministry is a response to a calling from God. They will have a vibrant relationship with God and a developed spirituality and devotional life which is able to sustain that relationship. Prayer, engagement with Scripture, worship and fellowship with other Christians, as well as service and outreach to others will be evident in their lives. They will be people whose lives have been transformed by God and who are capable of helping to bring transformation to others. There should be evidence of maturity in Christian discipleship marked, not necessarily by its length, but by its depth and practical application.

12. Commitment to diversity
Pioneers are likely to be working with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They will need to be sensitive and respectful to all and be able to cope and be comfortable with a diverse range of people, contexts, churches and situations. In the development of a Christian community they will seek to be open to and inclusive of all people as those who are loved and welcomed by God. They should, however, be aware of and respect the standing orders and usage of the Methodist Church on matters of doctrine, practice and morality.

13. Willingness to share learning
Pioneer mission leaders will have the ability to draw upon their prior learning and experience and apply it appropriately. They will be willing to engage with new learning and training opportunities which build on existing knowledge and attempt to address identified gaps, as well as understandings and competencies which directly relate to the context of the specific fresh expression of Church where they are working. Pioneers will be willing to learn from a wide range of sources. They will be willing to be coached or mentored by others and will also be willing to offer coaching or mentoring to others as appropriate.

This may seem like a daunting list – and in many ways it is. Like marriage, it is “not to be entered upon lightly”! But if you feel a genuine call to this form of mission, you can be sure that God’s grace will be sufficient to equip you for the task. If, after prayer and reflection, you feel that pioneering may be for you, have a word with your minister and others to see what opportunities there may be.

If you haven’t already undertaken the Mission-Shaped Ministry course that would be well worth considering, and do check the Fresh Expressions website for more insights into the world of pioneer mission.

www.missionshapedministry.org.uk
www.freshexpressions.org.uk