



1. Desiring to share the gospel

Where can you see the desire to share the gospel at work in your church?

What makes you want to share the gospel?

Introduction

People are motivated to share their faith for all sorts of reasons, but theological conviction and personal experience typically both play a part. The Evangelism Consultation sought to explore more fully what motivates Methodists to share faith, and where the desire for evangelism was found across the Church.

Some of those who responded to the online survey felt that the desire to share the gospel was not much in evidence within British Methodism, but the majority disagreed. Respondents pointed to initiatives such as Fresh Expressions, 3Generate, Chaplaincy, and Alpha, as well as festivals such as ECG and the Pentecost Festival. Those who reflected on what made them want to share the gospel pointed to theological themes such as the love and holiness of God, as well as the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Why this matters

The desire to 'share the gospel' was characteristic of the early Christians, and is witnessed particularly in the book of Acts. Having received the Spirit, the Christians sought to be "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" Acts 1:8 (NRSV). Evangelism took place through conversation as well as preaching, and – while involving key figures like Peter and Paul – involved the support of ordinary believers across the Mediterranean.

John Wesley's desire to share the good news with others established the centrality of evangelism from the earliest years of British Methodism. Wesley was particularly concerned that those disengaged from the established Church might be brought to faith, and his own 'conversion' experience at Aldersgate was a key motivator for his mission.

At the Evangelism Consultation, participants reflected on how the desire to share the gospel might be cultivated among churches. Insights included seeing evangelism as

a 'tiny spark' rather than a dying flame, focusing on the 'unique selling point', embracing and rejoicing in diversity, and communicating well at every level.

Those present at the consultation also wondered whether 'mission enablers' might be a good resource for every circuit, and that creating safe spaces to listen to people's stories – and identify their gifts – might be important. Respondents also felt that the Church needs to keep mission at the top of the agenda, while also empowering storytellers at local levels.

Further resources

- For a recent work exploring biblical and historical models of evangelism – and proposing a model of 'graceful evangelism' for today – see Frances S Adeney, *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Academic, 2010).
- The 'Pentecost festival' is an initiative to help churches share the message of Jesus with their local community – over the season of Pentecost. For details, see www.pentecostfestival.co.uk.
- For a range of resources on evangelism, visit www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources.

Questions for discussion

The following questions are suggested as ways of taking the conversation forward.

1. How did you come to faith?

What were the key moments, key conversations and significant people?

2. Where have you noticed God at work

- a. in church?
- b. in your community?
- c. in worship?

3. What do you think is 'good' evangelism? What do you expect to see?

4. What tools/resources/ideas do you know about which could help your church in their evangelistic calling?