



## 4. Making evangelism central

*How do we make evangelism a central part of what we do in the Methodist Church?*

*What are the first steps to make this a reality?*

### Introduction

Evangelism is a key part of the Methodist Church's calling, as the Church partly "exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ" (*Our Calling*, 2000). The practice of evangelism, however, is not always prioritised within local churches, and the Evangelism Consultation intended to explore why this might be the case.

Among those who responded to the online survey, there were a variety of suggestions on how best to improve in this area. Some suggested better communication, growth in prayer, and working with local preachers and leaders. Others focused on the need for new forms of church, including the creation of an 'order of evangelists' (as suggested in the Evangelism and Evangelists Report to the Methodist Conference in 2002). There was wide agreement that evangelism needs to be embedded more deeply within Methodism.

### Why this matters

In Scripture, the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) highlights 'making disciples' as a key part of the Church's mission. Paul's mission as apostle to the Gentiles also reflected this priority, while the Acts of the Apostles describes how earlier followers of Jesus told the story of their Lord across the ancient Mediterranean. Across the New Testament, the encounter with Jesus propelled his followers to share this 'good news' with those they met.

Since its beginnings, evangelism has also been central to British Methodism. John Wesley's practice of field-preaching was an attempt to reach those disengaged from the institutional Church, while the formation of early 'classes' (small groups) allowed people to explore faith

in a safe and supportive space. The Methodist Deed of Union speaks of the need to "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land", and – even today – evangelism is one of the four key parts of Methodism's calling.

At the Evangelism Consultation, participants began by reflecting on how they had been drawn to Christian faith. Childhood exposure to Church was important in most cases, but so too was being given opportunities to serve the Church and its mission. Many participants also spoke of the importance of para-church organisations, such as the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity or Easter People.

In exploring evangelism in today's society, participants were clear that there was no 'set formula', and those sharing the faith should recognise that God's Spirit is already at work outside the Church. Calling people to be disciples should involve an invitation to a journey that does not simply end with conversion. There was also a discussion over whether circuits help or hinder evangelism and mission, and a general concern that evangelism and mission needs to be a higher priority in the Church's life.

### Further resources

- For a distinctively Methodist approach to evangelism, see Hal Knight and Doug Powe, *Transforming Evangelism: The Wesleyan way of sharing faith* (Discipleship Resources, 2006).
- For an excellent four-session course on sharing your faith, see the Methodist resource *Talking of God* – available for free download at [www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod](http://www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod).
- For a range of resources on evangelism, visit [www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources).

# Questions for discussion

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

**1. What is your experience of evangelism in your local church?**

**2. What are the most helpful ways you have found to share faith?**

**3. In what ways can the Church equip or encourage you to share your faith?**

**4. How can evangelism be part of the whole Church's mission, rather than just for a few?**