



## A starting conversation

To help you and your small group engage with some of the issues surrounding evangelism, mission and faith sharing today

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### How to use this resource

This resource is intended to be used by a number of different group contexts. The sessions can be used in a:

- Local Preachers' Meeting – where you could use it as the devotional section, or use evangelism as a subject focus for the meeting
- Circuit Meeting – where you could use the material as an agenda item to help the meeting think about ways in which people and churches could be/are engaging in evangelism around the circuit
- Church Council Meeting – to help facilitate an agenda item on the subject of evangelism
- Circuit Leadership Team Meeting – as the devotional section, or as the main substance of a vision meeting for the circuit
- House Group – as a whole church series on aspects of evangelism
- Discussion Group – as a specific and time-limited group formed to work through some of the key issues raised in this series
- Coffee Morning - as a one-off guided conversation, with the intention of hearing from the peripheral

voices within a church community

- Synod – as a workshop or plenary discussion on mission and evangelism within a district.

These sheets offer an opportunity to get a conversation going, and to hear the perspectives of different people throughout the circuit and community.

Each can be used as a stand-alone conversation guide, or the whole set can be used as part of an extended house group series. Just make sure that you have enough sheets printed so that everyone is able to have a copy. This means that people with different learning styles can be resourced to engage in the conversation in a way which helps them best. Some people like to have something to write on, others like to read text and some like to reflect and refer back at a later time. By providing handouts, you are enabling and resourcing the conversation to continue at a later time – which can only be a good thing!

Be clear about how long the conversation and discussion is going to last. As an agenda item, you may only want to spend 20 minutes on this – which means being clear about moving on and covering all four questions. If you are facilitating a house group, then it may be possible to extend the conversation to cover a whole hour. You could do this by using some of the further resources listed at the end of each session.

### Taking things further

At the conclusion of each session is a small section pointing you towards further resources (both on and off line) which will help to continue the conversation even further. They are not an exhaustive list but rather a starting point for your ongoing reflection. If there are significant resources you think we have missed out, then get in touch with us ([esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk)) telling us about the resource and why you found it helpful, and we will try to put it onto the Deepening Discipleship part of the Methodist website ([www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship)).



# 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](http://www.pentecostfestival.co.uk).
- 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. 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?

## Summary of the Evangelism Consultation

In 2011, the General Secretary's Report to the Conference stated:

*"I suggest to the Conference that making more disciples of Jesus Christ through apt and appropriate ways is a key priority for our Connexion today. This involves committing ourselves, even in a time of scarcity, to put a disproportionate degree of resources and energy to this end, as the acknowledged weakest 'health indicator' throughout our Connexion."<sup>1</sup>*

As part of the response to this, in late 2012, members of the Connexional Team hosted a national consultation on evangelism. The methodology included an online survey, a full-day consultation with 80 people participating in focused group work, and a further day of theological reflection with the chairs of those groups and invited specialists.

From this consultation a significant number of themes were discussed and raised by participants. The eight areas of investigation have been revisited in this series, to enable and resource further an ongoing conversation about aspects of evangelism as it impacts upon the ministry and praxis of the Methodist Church: a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

Overall, the consultation achieved a great deal.

- It has stimulated a Methodist conversation about evangelism and mission and its place in twenty first-century discipleship. It is a timely exercise, as other organisations and agencies are also working through the changing nature of society and church practice.<sup>2</sup>
- The consultation saw participants celebrate the work of UK practitioners in the field of evangelism – notably the work of Rob Frost, Share Jesus International and Donald English; alongside more recent developments catalysed from the inspiration and work of Fresh Expressions.
- Many participants used language that demonstrates that *missio Dei* theology has permeated to the

grassroots. People noted the work of the Spirit, the need to be outside church buildings, and the importance of being connected (or relevant) to local cultures and contexts – both liturgically and in terms of community development.

- There was a recognition that God IS at work.
- Hospitality, in its broadest sense, was consistently recognised as a key factor in relationship building and faith sharing. Sharing food, creating safe spaces for people, and developing a culture of welcome were all significant factors for people. Coupled with this was the desire to be generous and to recognise God's generosity and provision.
- An important message from participants was that there are a significant number of programmes and courses available.
- Participants reflected on the motivation for evangelism – and those that responded to this question did so by recognising the love of God for all people.
- Relationships matter.
- The mixed economy of Church is crucial in order to enable people to discover and deepen their faith.
- One poignant response reflected on the 'smell of church' when they were in a fellowship group. The multi-sensory nature of spirituality and faith sharing was powerfully noted.
- Small groups help equip people for their discipleship throughout the week. How these groups are encouraged and resourced continues to be an important area of work.

Beyond the logistical evaluation of the consultation process, there were a number of areas for discussion and further work.

- People were not always clear regarding what they were talking about. The language can get quite muddled between evangelism and mission – and the distinction is negligible from a congregation's perspective.
- Participants reflected in detail about what made evangelism and mission difficult. Issues of confidence, energy and time, permission, family, perception, secularism and multiculturalism were all identified as key difficulties to sharing the gospel.

1. <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/41172/2-the-general-secretarys-report-0511.pdf> (paragraph 70, page 45)

2. 'Confidently Sharing the Gospel' Evangelical Alliance, <http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/upload/Confidently-sharing-the-gospel-final-report.pdf>

- Although respondents recognised the number of faith-sharing tools on the market about evangelism, there was a clear request for specific tools to be of use in evangelism.
- Evangelism can make people feel very vulnerable. How might the Church be able to recast a narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, which articulates vulnerability and dis-comfort?
- What are the outcomes that we are looking for when it comes to evangelism?
- Methodism is a broad Church, and there continues to be a need for a broad conversation about evangelism, atonement theology, and the process of ongoing discipleship.

- How is evangelism best resourced at all levels of the Church?

A more comprehensive summary of results is available on request to [esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk).

One of the outcomes from the consultation was the importance of this being the start, not the end of the conversation; and that further resources to enable this to happen would be beneficial. This series invites people in a variety of church contexts to engage with the questions raised through the consultation, and to continue to host a conversation about evangelism. The purpose is to begin to wrestle with the issues surrounding evangelism, and to help Methodist people gain confidence in their evangelistic calling.



## 2. What is the good news?

*What is the good news and why does sharing it matter?*

### Introduction

The Evangelism Consultation sought to capture the different theological streams within the Methodist Church, recognising that there are different ways in which people meet with God and are transformed. The key question for ongoing work is: In a mission shaped church and a church shaped for mission, what is the gospel and how do we notice it, share it and receive it in relationship with other people?

The online survey intended to bring out these theological themes; however respondents offered a more general observation on the nature of the evangelistic task in contemporary situations. Responses did note the importance of long-term relationships with people. The significance of doing the right things (eg social action and local community projects), rather than necessarily saying the right things was noted on a number of occasions. This dual approach to sharing good news – engagement and conversation – remains a significant feature of Methodism's calling to change the world and to change people.

### Why this matters

Throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, biblical scholarship attempted to discover the core features of the gospel – the key ingredients which made up the New Testament conversion narratives. This kerygma include:

- references to Jesus' fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies about the coming of the Messiah
- a narrative about Jesus' ministry
- the crucifixion of Jesus
- the resurrection of Jesus
- the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and to the early Church
- some mention of a judgement to come
- a call to repentance.

This has influenced the way that we now speak about the good news, and shapes the way that we communicate the gospel ourselves in our preaching and conversations, as the Evangelism Consultation demonstrated. Evangelism is often caricatured as being one-sided and ignorant (see The Fast Show's sketch, 'Holy Police'<sup>1</sup>), or is proclaimed and shouted from street-side pulpits on Speaker's Corner, or is scribbled onto large posters – often with the words "The end of the world is nigh". Good evangelism can be scary or difficult because of the prejudice Christians face, or the emotions which it brings out in us as we attempt to share good news.

Evangelism and the gospel has tended to be an individual and private matter. It is often been about getting the words right. However, the gospel needs to, and does, speak into different contexts and cultures. The simple 'one size fits all' nature of the gospel is all to do with the grace of God, and nothing to do with the words and expected outcome of evangelistic programmes and processes.

"The purpose of [sharing good news] is to give people permission to see how vast the Gospel is and to explore the many different starting points and connecting points that people might have with the message of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

*(Juliet Kilpin, a part-time coordinator of Urban Expression, and part-time community minister with a Baptist congregation in Essex)*

What if the gospel was intended to be incarnated – to be lived and breathed and wrestled with – in a locality and in relationship with people; rather than deconstructed and taught verbatim in a classroom, church sanctuary, or university? What might the gospel look like then?

1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO\\_sj2hAb84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO_sj2hAb84)

2. <http://julietkilpin.wordpress.com/2013/04/09/four-spiritual-laws-for-different-cultures/>

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## Further resources

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- *Hope – the heartbeat of mission* is a book full of ideas, tools, discussions and resources to help you, your community and your church engage with. It costs £5.99, or £3 for orders over 50. Available from <http://hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/133405/HOPE/Resources/Books/Books.aspx>
- The award-winning video 'Tell Show Be' is available for free download at [www.tellshowbe.com](http://www.tellshowbe.com) and is available in six languages: English, Welsh, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish and now Italian.
- A large database of free images and videos available for download and sharing is at [www.yesheis.com](http://www.yesheis.com).
- Online conversation, frequently asked questions, and free copies of Luke's Gospel can be found at the Christian Enquiries Agency website – [www.christianity.org.uk](http://www.christianity.org.uk) – a great site to put on notice sheets, orders of service and can be easily used in your mission events. It is run by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and is an excellent and 'safe' way of helping people engage with questions of faith.

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## Questions for discussion

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

### 1. What motivates/de-motivates you when it comes to evangelism?

### 2. What is good news for you?

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

### 4. How do we build up our confidence in evangelism?



### 3. Problems and obstacles

Why is evangelism so difficult/hard today?

#### Introduction

The Methodist Church has always prioritised mission and evangelism. That a consultation was required on the subject, however, suggests that although it is a named priority, it is still part of the Church's life which is difficult. The Evangelism Consultation invited inquisition into why this might be the case – and then moved the conversation on further to see how some of these difficulties might best be addressed.

In the consultation, it became apparent that there were three grouped areas of difficulty:

- external factors – such as secularism, other faith and cultural groups, and new atheism
- internal institutional factors – such as leadership, training, moral issues, sex, guilt, financial constraints, specialism
- personal factors – “if I can't convert my family, how can you expect me to lead anyone else to Christ”, lack of confidence, need to be multilingual (to speak into a local culture as well as a church culture).

The consultation also challenged the notion of quantitative results as a success marker for evangelism. What are we expecting as a result of evangelism? If we know this, then it would provide a greater vision for what to do in order to achieve it.

#### Why this matters

It can be easy to forget that evangelism has never been an easy calling and task: Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60); Peter was crucified (as was Jesus...); Paul preached for so long, someone fell out of the window (Acts 20:9); the Corinthians needed two letters to keep them on track.

Evangelism and ongoing discipleship development for new congregations and converts, even in the Bible, was a matter of life and death. There have always been external factors (governance, relationships with the

state, multicultural societies). And there have always been institutional factors – in fact the early Church split over who was in or out of God's reach (see Acts 10, 15).

Sharing faith and good news has inspired crusades, revolutions, reformations and schisms. The calling of Christians to share a message of hope and grace to a needy world has also fuelled an ongoing debate about the relationship between mission and evangelism.

The theologian Leonard Sweet said, “Evangelism is not learning to ‘share my faith’. Evangelism is lifting up Christ and paying attention to what he's up to in someone's life.” If this is correct, then evangelism is not so much about getting the words right, as being attentive to other people. Perhaps for this reason evangelism seems to be so difficult – as a natural inclination is to offer a quick fix to a situation, rather than to sit with the questions it raises.

There is something significant about leading an authentic life, however, which means that the gospel can be communicated through relationships with people, wherever they are.

Evangelism has often been about an individual doing something to another. What might happen if *missio Dei* is taken seriously, and we recognise that a conversation and encounter might provide the opportunity for someone to share faith with us. What happens if the Holy Spirit is already at work, and our task is to be present rather than to provide a prescription?

#### Further resources

- Steve Hollinghurst's *Mission Shaped Evangelism: the gospel in contemporary culture* (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2010) offers a vision for what faith sharing might be about today.
- [www.rachelheldevans.com/blog](http://www.rachelheldevans.com/blog) offers various conversations and observations about key moral issues in the world, and ways in which different

sides of the argument tackles them. It is the sort of site that is worth a weekly visit over a period of time, rather than as a one off look.

- The Venture FX blog ([www.venturefx.org.uk](http://www.venturefx.org.uk)) also tackles a number of issues faced by people trying to

living authentically Christian lives.

- Also check out the increasing pool of resources available on the Deepening Discipleship part of the Methodist website ([www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources)).

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## ***Questions for discussion***

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

- 1. What are the three biggest problems and obstacles that you face when it comes to evangelism?**

- 2. What are the biggest objections to Christianity that you face from those outside of the Church? How would you begin to respond to them?**

- 3. The consultation suggested that one problem was the Church itself. Why do you think this might be, and what could you change in order to begin to change people's opinions?**

- 4. What resources do you need, in order to face some of the challenges? What do you already know about?**



## 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?**



## 5. Images of evangelism (1)

Can you think of things that help to make and nurture new disciples?

If so, how do we start using them?

### Introduction

The good news of Jesus Christ has come alive in people's transformed lives and kingdom living in multiple different cultures and contexts through the ages. These have given the world glimpses of God's kingdom. People are drawn to the gospel as they see it lived out in attractive living. A critical question for us is: what sort of disciples are we trying to form?

It can perhaps look as if we are trying to form disciples that show up, pay up and shut up and we have well-worked out practices to form this sort of disciple. But we know there is more to discipleship than this. If someone has discovered the experience of the love of Christ and wants to investigate and commit themselves to a Christian way of life – what practices can we as a Christian community, introduce them to, perhaps outside of a Sunday morning context, to enable them to become apprentices of this Christian way of life? Becoming a disciple is an intentional formational process. It doesn't happen accidentally.

### Why this matters

In the Gospels we glimpse stories of how encounters with Jesus transformed people's lives. The rich man Zacchaeus joyfully gave away half his wealth (Luke 19:1-10), fishermen left old occupations to become healers and teachers (Mark 6:6-13), a healed demoniac went back into his village to share what had happened to him (Mark 5:19-20), a woman was affirmed in a traditionally more male role of sitting at his feet to learn (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus taught that on the day of judgement those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and prisoners who would enter God's kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46). James urged people to be not only hearers, but doers of it (James 1:22).

The Methodist movement began with small groups exploring what it meant to be disciples of Jesus. In the 1720s a group of student friends at Oxford

University met regularly to study together, pray, read the Scriptures, attend church, visit people in prison, and teach poor children to read. These principles were to become core to Methodist discipleship, which held together 'works of piety' (devotional practices) and 'works of mercy' (disciplines of practical caring). Methodists belonged to classes (small groups) and held one another accountable to three simple principles: do no harm, do good and love God.

The Evangelism Consultation encouraged people to think about the important influences that had formed them as disciples. People identified a range of people who had at different times invested in them: taught, mentored, challenged and supported them. There was general agreement at the importance of an intentionality in being formed as a disciple: disciples need to learn a number of practices and be held gently accountable for using them. Small groups were seen as important. These needed to be safe places for people to be themselves, ask questions, share lives, have fun, and enjoy hospitable fellowship. They also needed an intentional outward focus to enable people to integrate faith and life. Worship of a high quality and good foundational biblical teaching were seen as crucial.

### Further resources

- Martyn Atkins, *Discipleship and the People called Methodists* (downloadable from the Methodist website <http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/discipleship-and-the-people-called-methodists>)
- Roger Walton, *The Reflective Disciple: learning to live as faithful followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century* (Norwich, SCM Press, 2012)
- For an eight-session resource aimed at those new to faith or new to Methodism, see *Compass* (available from Methodist Publishing after September 2013).
- For a range of resources on spiritual practices, 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 was helpful in your own process of becoming a disciple? And what was unhelpful?**

**2. What sort of disciple are you trying to form?**

**3. What learning activities, practices and support are needed to form this sort of disciple?**

**4. How can we find ways of helping people who are outside Church culture become apprenticed disciples of Jesus?**



## 6. Evangelism and ethnicity

How can we learn about evangelism from culturally diverse groups in the UK?

How do we go about listening to what these groups might have to say?

### Introduction

British Methodism is a culturally diverse community, and so learning to listen to – and learn from – other groups can strengthen evangelism across the whole Church.

The response to the online survey revealed that many Methodists recognised the importance of listening to Methodists from culturally diverse groups, with some emphasising that this was best seen as a ‘two-way process’. Respondents also shared the ways they had learnt from different experiences of worship and wrote of how diverse churches can work together in reaching out to others.

### Why this matters

The New Testament shows the gospel breaking through cultural and ethnic barriers, and inviting all to embrace God’s kingdom. As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul played a key role in this process, encouraging the Jewish believer to accept their gentile brother or sister in Christ and vice versa (Romans 14). The vision in Revelation of people from all nations gathered together before the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-17) has also been an inspiration for churches working together in mission.

Methodism has always had a global dimension, reflected in Wesley’s famous claim, “I look on all the world as my parish”, and – within Wesley’s lifetime – Thomas Coke was appointed as a missionary to America. Throughout the Church’s history, Methodists from across the world have been involved in mission overseas, and – today – in reverse missionaries are also arriving to help evangelise Britain.

At the consultation, participants reflected on the importance of hearing voices from other cultures. Learning about the experience of coming to the United Kingdom from overseas – including finding Britain a less ‘Christian’ country than expected – can help the Church reflect on its mission today, while exposure to other evangelistic approaches can be both challenging and inspiring.

The participants also pointed out the challenge for culturally diverse congregations engaging with the local community, where people are often surprised to find they are Christians. Those from other cultures can also find it difficult to find opportunities to serve in their churches, and cultural and language barriers contribute to this. In terms of the practice of evangelism, culturally diverse congregations have highlighted the importance of friendship and families in sharing faith. The participants also noted that the ‘missing voice’ within the conversation around evangelism is the younger generation, with many churches populated by few aged under 50.

### Further resources

- There are a range of resources exploring evangelism and mission among other cultures available, but - for reaching out to those from a South Asian background – see C Rasiah and Robin Thomson, *Notes for the Journey: following Jesus, staying South Asian* (London, South Asian Concern, 2011).
- For a resource exploring how to ‘welcome’ people into church, including those from other cultures, see *First Impressions Count: deepening your church’s culture of welcome*, available at [www.methodist.org.uk/mission/welcome-and-invitation](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/welcome-and-invitation).
- 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 worshipping alongside those from other ethnicities or cultures?**

**2. How might our evangelism change if we take account of Methodists from ethnic groups different to your own?**

**3. What voices in your community are missing from your local church?**

**4. What are the challenges and opportunities of reaching out to different cultures with the gospel?**



## 7. Images of evangelism (2)

*How do we change the image of evangelism so that every Methodist sees it as something in which they should be involved? How do we communicate these changes?*

### Introduction

Evangelism often has a poor image. Say the 'E-word' and you're more likely to evoke images of aggressive tele-evangelists or street preachers than someone sensitively sharing their faith with a friend. This is a shame, since 'evangelism' itself is a positive word, a word that means 'sharing the good news'. If people only hear it as bad news, or as news that's conveyed without respect and love, then they're unlikely to listen to the message.

Among those who responded to the online survey, many pointed out the importance of 'confidence' for evangelism – confidence in the Christian faith and how to share it. Respondents also gave a range of views on the 'content' of the gospel – is it about getting back to the basics, expressing a new vision, or living out the kingdom? The respondents also explored the relationship between evangelism and discipleship.

### Why this matters

When we think about 'evangelists' within Scripture, what's striking is the diversity of examples that might come to mind: Philip inviting Nathanael to "come and see" Jesus (John 1:43-51); the blind man – now healed – sharing his story (John 9:13-34); Paul boldly engaging with Jews in the synagogues and Gentiles in the cities of Asia Minor (Acts 16–20). Perhaps the diversity of ways to share faith in Scripture can inspire our own efforts today.

Evangelism is one of the four key parts of the Methodist Church's Calling, and reports have emphasised its importance to the Methodist Conference. In his 2011 General Secretary's Report to the Conference, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins explains that:

*"Evangelism is ... transformative, containing within it all the passion of piety and social justice inextricably connected together. It relates directly to the invitation to live out whole-life, life-long and world-transforming discipleship. It is both fuelled by and enables worship, and expresses itself in service and learning and caring."<sup>1</sup>*

At the Evangelism Consultation, participants spoke of the difficulties of embedding evangelism within the Methodist Church. Some pointed to the lack of knowledge of Scripture and the 'basics' of faith, while others explored the difficulties around the term 'evangelism'.

In exploring possible ways ahead, suggestions included the rediscovery of the calling of an evangelist, seeking to equip each Methodist to know their story and identity, and celebrating the ways in which churches are currently working together in mission. Rather than focusing simply on 'running the institution', respondents agreed that churches need to prioritise evangelism.

### Further resources

- For a helpful approach to evangelism, see Brian D McLaren *More Ready than You Realize: evangelism as dance in the postmodern matrix* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2002).
- 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).

1. <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/41172/2-the-general-secretarys-report-0511.pdf> (paragraph 68, page 45)

## **Questions for discussion**

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

### **1. What are the images that come to mind when you think of evangelism?**

### **2. How many members in your church are currently involved in evangelism? What are they doing?**

### **3. What approaches to evangelism do you find most inspiring and helpful?**

### **4. How can the national Church make sure that evangelism remains a priority? And what about your church?**



## 8. Giving reasons for your faith

How do we go about explaining the gospel in the twenty-first century?

How do we do this as a Methodist Church?

### Introduction

One of the key questions at the Evangelism Consultation focused on how Methodists can give reasons for their faith in twenty first-century Britain. Theologically, giving reasons for your faith is known as ‘apologetics’, and has been part of the Christian tradition from its earliest stages.

The online responses to the evangelism survey included a call for Christian responses to secularists and the ‘new atheists’, which might include demonstrating that there is no real conflict between religion and science. Other contributors spoke of the need to show that Christian faith is relevant to everyday life, while some noted the need for ‘academics’ and others within the Connexion who can rise to the challenge of intellectually defending the faith.

### Why this matters

1 Peter 3:15-16 provides a classic admonition to give reasons for our faith: “always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence”(NRSV). The sermons in Acts also demonstrate how the early preachers of the Church adapted their sermons to respond the culture and academic background of their audiences (eg Acts 17:16-34), and such examples can help us reflect on our apologetics today.

Within the Methodist tradition, explaining why faith is ‘reasonable’ has a long pedigree. One way of expressing this has been through the ‘Wesley Quadrilateral’, which highlights the importance of reason and experience – alongside Scripture and tradition – in theological reflection. This does not mean

that Methodists change their faith to suit the context, but rather that Methodists consider carefully how best to express their faith reasonably.

At the consultation, the discussion initially focused on the meaning of ‘apologetics’. One participant suggested that apologetics is “conversation that creates fertile ground for evangelism”, but there was also a concern that apologetics should always be pursued in a context of living and sharing the faith naturally. The group also discussed a range of challenges to apologetics today. These ranged from ‘church factors’ – such as a lack of confidence, the sacred-secular divide, and the theological breadth of the church – to ‘social factors’ – such as the media portrayal of faith, the seeming irrelevance of faith, and consumerism.

In response to such challenges, participants made suggestions such as creating space for experiencing faith, finding a new kind of language, and having access to good resources on apologetics. In terms of the practice of apologetics, the group highlighted the importance of telling stories, listening to others, acknowledging humility, and recognising context.

### Further resources

- There are many resources on apologetics that present the case for Christianity against its detractors. A recent work that many have found helpful is Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God: belief in an age of scepticism* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009).
- For a website that offers a host of resources for exploring and communicating the Christian faith, see [www.bethinking.org](http://www.bethinking.org).
- 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. How has your faith been challenged within contemporary culture?

## 2. How have you responded to such challenges?

## 3. What reasons would you give for being a Christian?

## 4. How can your church help its members gain confidence in talking about the reasons for their faith?