

Embedding the Justice-seeking Church Report: a Strategy

MC/24/7

Date of meeting	29-30 January 2024
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Action required	For approval
Resolution	The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	This report sets out a strategy for embedding the Conference report, <i>A Justice-seeking Church</i> .
Main points	The report sets out: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the vision for a justice-seeking Church, as set out in the Conference report; 2. four strategic aims: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Integrating the ‘Principles for justice’ into our learning and decision-making b. Collaborating on the ‘Priorities for justice’ between partners, developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement c. Engagement with the ‘Practices: approaches to justice’ at all levels of church life d. Support for local churches to engage with local communities within a justice framework along with recommended key actions; 3. key approaches within the strategy, including following and sharing existing energy within the Connexion, working with structures to achieve longer term change, and identifying key actions in support of culture change; 4. how the Practices for justice can help support future decision-making; 5. and how the proposed strategy inter-relates with other key connexional strategies and work areas.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	A Justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking With Micah project, Methodist Conference 2023 https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29385/conf-23-pc-12-walking-with-micah-project.pdf

Consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those responsible for work and strategies listed at paragraph 23 • Mission Committee • Samples of groups and individuals engaged at church- and district-level justice work • Groups involved in justice work associated with the Methodist Church • Ecumenical conversations, including with Joint Public Issues Team Strategy and Policy Group
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Summary of impact

Financial	The strategy will use existing resources, with the exploration of partnerships in support of the strategy
Wider connexional	This strategy is invitational rather than mandatory, so the impact in terms of eg resources, planning, activities, worship, will be on churches and wider groups that decide to engage with the strategy
External, including ecumenical	There is potential for closer relations with groups and other denominations particularly through collaboration around the priorities for justice
Risk	The risk of not implementing a strategy is that the momentum behind the Conference report is forgotten, and that action for justice in local churches is stretched and unsupported

Embedding the Justice-seeking Church Report: a Strategy

MC/24/7

Introduction

1. The Methodist Conference in 2023 adopted the report, A justice-seeking Church, and directed the Methodist Council to agree a plan to enable and embed the proposals and suggestions set out between paragraphs 208 and 213 of the report in collaboration with key stakeholders, and oversee its implementation (Resolution 12/2: Conference Agenda p192).
2. This paper sets out the strategic aims and key actions needed to embed the report in the life of the Church. It is supported by an action plan spreadsheet¹ which goes into more detail on the proposed actions and will be a living document as the strategy develops.
3. This is a strategy initially for two years, but is adaptive: many of the actions identified will continue to develop beyond that; we will always be learning and growing. It is not just a list of “new” ideas: there are many actions already underway or in development, and during the course of the strategy we will need to keep paying attention to what is already going on and to new circumstances. It is a strategy which draws on the commitment of various parts of the Connexional Team and Methodist and other organisations, and also invites, and is dependent upon, the creative co-ownership by districts, circuits and churches.

Vision: Where are we going? And why?

4. The Justice-seeking Church report imagined a future for the Methodist Church – “*a small, sometimes marginalised, but richly diverse community with a big vision and a deep passion for justice and peace, living out a Methodist Way of Life.*” The hopes expressed in the report expressed this vision of the future:
 - congregational relationships which are deeper and inclusive
 - integration between churches and local communities for mutual flourishing
 - church engagement in a range of actions and witness for change
 - worship that is infused with a longing for justice
 - a desire to hold and share good news
5. This is a vision that echoes what the Methodist Church has been advocating through A Methodist Way of Life and the God for All strategy. It is a vision of a Church which is God-centred and where justice, discipleship and evangelism are gospel partners. This strategy, along with God for All, prioritises the need to resource God’s people in mission and ministry in local contexts.

Strategic priorities: So how are we going to get there?

6. The Conference identified four key elements, related to the Justice-seeking Church report, as ways of reaching this vision.

Integrating the ‘Principles for justice’ into our learning and decision-making

7. The Principles for Justice “*offer a description of what underpins our beliefs, for us as Methodists, about a God of justice*” and what this means for us if we are to be justice-seeking. They are a powerful expression of what keeps us rooted as we wrestle with situations of injustice, helping us to articulate our call to justice, both inside and beyond the Methodist Church, in ways that are clear and compelling. The Conference also expressed the hope that “*the Principles will be tools to support discernment, individually and collectively, as we continually face new challenges of injustice.*”

¹ Available on request from lampardr@methodistchurch.org.uk

8. This strategic theme is a call to integrate the Principles for Justice in our learning and decision-making through:
 - a. Identifying ways for churches and Methodists to engage deeply with the Principles, including as part of a Methodist Way of Life
 - b. Ensuring Principles are reflected and reflected upon in communications, preaching and learning
 - c. Equipping people to draw upon the Principles, as well as the Priorities and Practices for justice, in decision-making throughout the whole of the Methodist Church in Britain

Recommended actions

- *Commission a variety of new resources, including a bible study series and a Justice and Peace prayer book*
- *Encourage the flowering of resources from other sources, and enable their amplification*
- *Work with the Connexional Communications Team to ensure that the Principles and Priorities are reflected in the language, stories and images used in Methodist communications*
- *Support Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) in embracing and using the Principles in shaping and articulating ecumenical justice work*
- *Work with JPIT, Evangelism and Growth, Local Preachers to reframe or create resources linking faith, justice and action*
- *Identify ways in which the Principles can help us ground our commitment to prioritising contexts marked by economic marginalisation*
- *Identify some key issues coming before decision-making bodies where engagement with Principles would be helpful*
- *Pilot exercise with some Districts and Circuits to explore how the Principles and being a Justice-seeking Church can resource decision-making (eg agenda setting, the facilitation of meetings and appropriate outcomes)*
- *Enable the process to support Conference in conferring on one of the Priority issues*

Collaborating on the 'Priorities for justice' between partners, developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement

9. The Priorities for Justice – poverty, refugees, climate, discrimination and peace – “*emerged from reflection on conversations with Methodists (including global partners), people experiencing injustice, and Methodist and other organisations, as well as reflecting on the Bible, our hymns and our past.*” They also reflect the gifts, strengths and opportunities we have now, as well as our limitations, which lead us to focus on ‘what is ours to do’. Sometimes what is ‘ours to do’ may be ‘ours’ as a local Church; at other times it may be ‘ours’ as a District, as the Connexional Team or through the Presidency. But, being connexional, we do it in each case on behalf of the whole Church.
10. This strategic theme aims to enable collaboration on the Priorities for justice in order to create opportunities for local church engagement through:
 - a. Strengthening collaboration between Methodist organisations, the Connexional Team, local churches, groups and networks
 - b. Supporting and engaging with the development of justice work across the Connexional team
 - c. Building identity, momentum and action around the five Priority issues as Methodist churches

Recommended key actions:

- *Explore how offering Justice-Seeking Church and Priorities for Justice branding and messaging enables local churches to engage in mission*
- *Support deeper collaborations with growing strands of justice work of teams within Connexional team, including Children Youth and Families, Evangelism and Growth, JPIT, Ministries and, through Global Relationships, with partner Churches*
- *Establish collaborating groups drawing together relevant organisations, groups and networks around the five Priorities, with the aim of resourcing local churches and building power within the Methodist Church, probably beginning with climate and poverty*
- *Work with the collaborating groups to identify and support key actions or campaigns around the five Priorities – eg Let’s End Poverty, Action for Hope, Together with Refugees*
- *Work with All We Can as they build on their board’s decision to develop their advocacy strategy to reflect the Priorities for justice*
- *Report annually to Mission Committee on how the Methodist Church is responding to the Priorities*

Engagement with the 'Practices: approaches to justice' at all levels of church life

11. The "Practices for justice" or approaches to practising justice – being with, humility in community, the use of power, transformation and prayer – were adopted by the Conference as ways of enabling *"sustainable, transformative and rooted action for justice to develop in churches and communities, as well as keeping our actions grounded in and guided by our faith. Because justice is a complex and often contested notion, these practices help us to stay close to God and to those who experience injustice. They assist us in discerning how and where to act, as well as humbly acknowledging our failures and limitations. They spring from and can be woven into a Methodist Way of Life, and build on the expectation that Methodists are engaging in various forms of justice activity."*
12. This strategic theme enables an engagement with the Practices at all levels of church life through:
 - a. Prioritising the practice of "being with, not for" in all we do
 - b. Embedding Faith-rooted Community Organising (FRCO) as a way to enable churches to engage with the Practices
 - c. Developing a culture of being attentive to the Practices in decision-making, reflection and learning, and actions

Recommended key actions:

- *Work with All We Can on their forthcoming resource exploring the Practices*
- *Supporting Methodist engagement with broad-based community organising, and the continued/expanded roll out of FRCO through work alongside Church at the Margins*
- *Identify opportunities to embed Practices in work with current and future leaders, eg superintendents conference, Cliff placements, 3Generate*
- *Identify opportunities to incorporate being attentive to the Practices into existing systems, eg New Place for New People (NPNP) application process*
- *Work with the Connexional Communications Team to identify opportunities to name and model Practices in Methodist communications*

Support for local churches to engage with local communities within a justice framework

13. The report *"identifies the Local Church very much as the locus of justice activity and transformation... In order for the work to flourish and the Methodist Church and its people to remain true to Our Calling, justice work must remain central to the life of Local Churches."* This doesn't mean that churches need to do everything themselves, rather that *"our vocations to justice need to be held within the community of the church to benefit from others' insights, offer holistic discipleship, meet with God in prayer, and enrich our common life."* At a time when many churches feel under pressure this may be an important reminder. There may be a season to seek collaboration with and through other churches, or for some a recognition that it is time to celebrate what has been done and pass it on to others who are still active. Holding our vocations to justice within our worshipping communities will enable us to deepen our faith and discern what we are called to do.
14. Therefore this strategic theme aims to support local churches engaging with local communities through:
 - a. Identifying and focusing on building support and energy with those who are providing connection and invigoration within Districts
 - b. Enabling active individuals and churches to find mutual practical and spiritual encouragement
 - c. Supporting local churches to take action, and reflect on it, within a framework of justice

Recommended key actions

- *Enabling production of resources (bible studies, tools) to support engagement with A Justice-seeking Church*
- *Working closely with a small number of districts to explore what works, and grow that*
- *Establishing "connections" or communities for individuals and churches engaged with action or justice to facilitate support, mutual learning and spirituality*
- *Developing and supporting a network of justice collaborators working with local churches within the Connexional Team*
- *Reviewing use of Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice money and share learning*
- *Engaging with ChurchWorks, Citizens UK and others to identify how local churches can be supported practically in taking action within a justice framework*

- *Offering light touch self-audit linked to A Methodist Way of Life of what it means to be a Justice-seeking Church*

Making it happen

15. This section on making the strategy happen looks at some of the “how” questions.

Key approaches

16. These four strategic priorities above also require three key approaches in order to deliver them:
17. **Following the energy** – there is already a lot of justice-seeking going on in the Methodist Church. The Walking with Micah process and *Justice-seeking Church* report created enthusiasm. Identifying what is already happening and can be celebrated builds momentum. Bottling and sharing it spreads a movement.
18. **Working with connexional structures to achieve longer-term change** – one of the key frames for the *Justice-seeking Church* report is that the call to be justice-seekers lies with each of us, and the activity of justice-seeking is found throughout the Church and across the Connexional Team. Locating and embedding the Principles, Priorities and Practices through Connexional and District structures, strategy and sub-teams will increase the reach, sustainability and impact.
19. **Focusing on key actions aimed at culture change** – This strand identifies the key activities which will contribute towards wider culture change (as well as key deliverables), through developing and sharing new visions and enabling changes in behaviour.
20. The plan available separately shows how these approaches draw out the strategic themes.

Enabling good decision-making

21. This plan sets the direction, indicating where it is most effective and efficient for activity to happen, but ultimately everyone within the Connexion already has permission to respond to the Conference report in ways that are most appropriate for them contextually. And not everything can therefore be included in a single plan (though it is hoped that we can, over time, learn from what is going on).
22. As this happens, and as new opportunities arise, we will be invited to make good decisions. The Conference report recommended that the Practices for justice “*be used in all parts of the life of the Methodist Church, locally and connexionally, as criteria when we reflect on our life, work, decisions and actions*”. Rightly, they should also influence the approaches taken in this strategy, and act as guiding standards to help make good decisions about how to achieve our vision and priorities:
 - **Being with not for** – encourage actions which enable people to be with rather than for; seek two-way relationships, encounter and learning
 - **Humility in community** – encourage churches to do things which enable them to be present in their communities to listen to and learn from our communities, from the lived experience of others, and that shapes our discernment; recognise churches’ exhaustion: how is more important than how much
 - **Self-awareness and the use of power** – choosing whether or not to challenge injustice is a luxury many don’t have; work alongside others to learn and share power
 - **Visibility [of injustice] and transformation** – seek transformation, holding together social action, social justice and organising principles; encouragement to have imagination to see other things are possible. Small acts are important, but we should not get stuck or comfortable there.
 - **Prayer** – seek opportunities to relate faith and justice, contemplation and activism, prayer and discernment.

Engaging with other key connexional work

23. *Our Calling* describes the purpose of the Methodist Church. Within that, *God For All*, with its vision of a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church, offers both an identity and a series of ways in which the Church can grow towards its calling. There are then a range of other key strategies, adopted by the Council or Conference, which show the intended direction of travel over the coming years. The Connexional Team has distinct work areas with agreed work plans that also

intersect with the purposes of *Justice-seeking Church*. The tables below offer some high level indication of the ways in which the *Justice-seeking Church* work dovetails with existing work; the separate plan identifies the work at a more granular level.

Strategy	Collaboration through
God for All and A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL)	<p>There is shared and consistent messaging around the gospel priorities of evangelism and social justice between God for All and A justice-seeking Church, as well as a prioritisation of contexts marked by economic marginalisation. A justice-seeking Church will result in direct collaboration around embedding of Faith-rooted Community Organising, justice dimensions of NPNPs, social justice and evangelism resourcing and mission development</p> <p>For local churches and members, engaging with A justice-seeking Church is a way of living out a Methodist Way of Life and responding to the invitation to grow in discipleship.</p> <p>The justice-seeking Church plan will contribute to the resourcing of MWOL, eg through supporting resourcing for aspects of Challenge, Flourish, Serve, but also to embedding justice dimensions throughout all aspects of A Methodist Way of Life – Justice at every station!</p>
Justice Dignity and Solidarity	<p>The Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) strategy and justice-seeking Church strategy are inter-related but distinct. The JDS strategy has focused on the necessary cultural, behavioural and procedural changes in the Church so that all can experience justice. The justice-seeking Church report offered broad Principles for justice as well as Priorities and Practices necessary to contribute to changes in the world of which we are a part. There will be particular dialogue around the Priority for justice around discrimination, and the JDS strand on Structural, Cultural and Attitudinal Change, especially around the need for personal transformation through encounter</p>
Action for Hope	<p>Action for Hope will be a key way in which churches can respond to Priority for justice on the climate, through sustained efforts to reach net zero.</p>

Work Area	Collaboration through
Children, Youth and Family	<p>The focus and orientation of the CYF workplan (especially participation, diversity, margins) harmonises well with the priorities of the justice-seeking Church. In particular there will be opportunities for shared work around 3Generate and Agents of Change.</p>
Including Young Adults	<p>Possibilities for collaboration around the promotion of vocations in social action and justice for young adults.</p>
Ministries and Training	<p>Courses and programmes offered at both training institutions have an intentionally connecting thread of justice. Local Preacher training has a lens and orientation towards justice. The focus on chaplaincy, the equipping of lay ministries and Flourish schools is also relevant.</p>
Learning Network	<p>Members of the Learning Network resource learning across many of the other strands and support the development of key areas such as FRCO, Church at the Margins and JDS.</p>

Resources

24. The separate plan indicates the range of actions envisaged to reach the strategic goals. These actions broadly fall into one of the following:

- a. A development of existing work (by a part of the Connexional Team, an organisation or group) and is expected to be covered by existing budgets
 - b. A new piece of work to be undertaken by another team or organisation (sometimes with support); usually this is already factored into workplans or budgets, though some are new pieces of work that may require conversations around additional or reprioritised resourcing
 - c. A new area of work to be led or initiated by the Director of Social Justice and Social Action (DSJSA) or colleagues, with time often the key resource required.
25. In the current year, the direct budget for the justice-seeking Church work includes provision for:
- a. Expenses of meetings for groups around priorities or planning
 - b. Some provision for resources – though some may be incorporated in other budgets
 - c. A small provision for evaluation support
 - d. Funding of staff: DSJSA and Project Officer (working 2 days a week on A justice-seeking Church and Let's End Poverty, and 2 days a week on Global justice issues)
26. The real resource for the strategy lies beyond the direct budget for funding the justice-seeking Church work or the role of the Director for Social Justice and Social Action. The key actions identified are shared across the Connexional Team and with other groups and organisations. And in order for them to make a difference, local churches need to feel enabled to engage with the strategy starting where they are. The plan and timescales to implement this strategy will need to be formulated largely by taking into account how we might best use our existing resources as well as the consideration of how partnerships to support the strategy could be formed.
27. Crucially, the potential impact of this plan relies on the depth of collaboration, activation, resource sharing, strategic connection, communication between local churches, circuits, districts as well as with groups, networks and within the Connexional Team. As the strategy is rolled out over the next few years, this deep collaboration will be key if it is to be connected to the realities of local churches and embedded across the connexion.

Evaluation of the work

28. This is not the kind of work where the impact can easily be measured. However it is necessary to put in place an evaluative tool so that we can see whether the plan is having an impact. Key to this evaluation is that:
- a. it should enable learning throughout the process
 - b. it should recognise narratives as well as numbers
 - c. it should be light touch
 - d. it should include not just what we have done as a Church but also how we have ourselves been changed
 - e. It should listen for the unexpected
29. A framework for regular evaluation throughout the process will be put in place, with regular opportunities for learning, as well as reports to the Mission Committee.

*****RESOLUTION**

7/1. The Council receives the report.

Appendix 1- from *A Justice-Seeking Church, the report of the Walking with Micah project* to the 2023 Conference

1. **In order to give life to the Principles, Priorities and Practices identified in the Walking with Micah report, we recommend that a two-year plan be developed to enable and embed the following throughout the life of the Methodist Church, including:**
 - a. **Integration of the 'Principles for justice' into our learning and decision-making**
 - b. **Engagement with the 'Practices: approaches to justice' at all levels of church life**
 - c. **Collaboration on the 'Priorities for justice' between partners,² developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement**
 - d. **Support for local churches to engage with local communities within a justice framework**
2. Success will depend on collaboration and participation of teams within the Connexional Team, wider Methodist organisations, as well as circuit and district leadership deciding how to embed the Principles, Priorities and Practices in participatory ways within their own mission. The following are examples of actions which could help to embed the outcomes of this report within the Methodist Church:
3. **Integration of the 'Principles for justice' into our learning and decision-making**
 - Identification of opportunities to engage with the Principles through, for example, ministerial formation, preacher development, 3Generate, Cliff College, Learning Network
 - Development of resources for small groups and Bible studies around the Principles for justice, including resources for intergeneration conversations and youth group settings
 - Use of Principles by JPIT when exploring current challenges
 - Intentional use of Principles, in appropriate language, when articulating Methodist responses to injustices
 - Reflection of the language of the Principles in prayer and liturgy
4. **Engagement with the 'Practices: approaches to justice' at all levels of church life**
 - Development of a tool for churches and others within the Connexion to explore their own justice activities in the light of the approaches to justice, and those of organisations with which they wish to engage in partnership
 - Intentional use of the language of the approaches to practicing justice in Methodist communication
5. **Collaboration on the 'Priorities for justice' by partners, developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement**
 - Annual conferring at the Conference on a theme arising from the Priorities for justice, which is used to shape future work, as well as a report on the other priorities
 - Working ecumenically where possible, committed collaboration around the Priorities for justice from Methodist and non-Methodist entities – potentially in the form of a strategic collaboration group for each of the priorities, continuing to model participation
 - A flexing of connexionally-resourced support for effective work around the Priorities for justice – for example, this might involve: JPIT reflecting the priorities in its workplan; Children Youth and Family considering how children and young people can be supported in their discipleship through working for justice and influencing change through their churches, 3Generate or the Agents of Change Discipleship and Vocation resource; global Church partners shaping MCB work on refugees; other Methodist organisations such as All We Can exploring where their advocacy work overlaps with the priorities
 - Communities of practice for individuals and churches deeply engaged with each of the Priorities in order to support one another and shape the work on the Priorities

² Partners are envisaged as being those with an interest in the Priorities, including Methodist entities and relevant parts of the Connexional Team, as well as local churches, groups and networks

- Development of shared plans for delivering campaigns, resources, communications on the five priorities, with clear messaging and opportunities for churches to join in or to flex to reflect local circumstances
- Explore models to develop and resource a consistent representative communicator on each Priority for justice

6. Support for local churches and others making a shift towards justice

- Collaboration across mission planning, Church at the Margins, a Methodist Way of Life, Learning Network, ministries, communications, JPIT, Children Youth and Family, ministerial training etc
- Resources for churches, including intergenerational resources, as they reimagine worship, along with resources and training for preachers and worship leaders
- Collective support in prayer for those engaged in justice-seeking, eg the online Micah community being piloted by the Manchester and Stockport District
- Communications training and briefings for leaders of all ages, from children up, within churches, circuits and districts who identify as being leaders for justice
- Rolling out of Methodist Faith-Based organising pilot and support for Methodists engaging in community organising
- JPIT's Constituency Action Network project to provide training and focus for engagement
- Regular opportunities for churches to engage with one of the priorities, according to the plans developed for each of them by the collaboration groups