

Report from the Connexional Team

MC/24/8

Date of meeting	29-30 January 2024
Contact name and details	Doug Godfrey-Swanney, Connexional Secretary, godfrey- swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	To note
Resolutions	8/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To provide the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to <i>Our Calling</i> .
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- 1 At each meeting of the Council the Connexional Team presents a full report on a number of areas of its work. Through these reports it is hoped that the Districts and the wider Connexion are able to keep abreast of all that the Team is undertaking on the direction of the Council.
- 2 The Connexional Team continues to meet monthly online where updates and key items of work are shared. Each sub-team has its own regular meetings to consider progress towards items of work with which the team is engaged. There is also a range of meetings for larger items of work to enable cross-team collaboration.
- 3 The HR team is providing support to the work of the Nominations Committee. To enable effective support towards this important area of work we have appointed Chloe Lincoln-Todd as an HR Project Officer on a fixed-term basis.
- 4 Another key development to share with the Council is that we are delighted that we have been able to appoint Daniel Bishop to the role of Director of Ministry Development. Daniel took up his new role on 2 January and will report to the Head of Ministries and Learning.
- 5 We have also recruited a project manager to lead on work that improves our electronic records' management systems and processes. Initial scoping has been undertaken and we are now producing a project plan that will bring in protocols for the retention of records that support our newer hybrid working arrangements.
- 6 As indicated in the previous report to the Council, the work of the Team is now presented under the four headings of *Our Calling* below.
- 7 The following is the work of the Team since the last report to the Council MC/23/65.

WORSHIP - Ensuring our worship and ministry are effective and relevant and give glory to God.

- 8 The Youth President Thomas Hart had a very successful visit to the Evangelical Methodist Church in Argentina (IEMA) and CREAS, the Regional Ecumenical Centre for Christian Consultancy Services. Tom was accompanied by Phoebe Parkin, former youth president and a fluent Spanish speaker.
- 9 Easter Offering 2024: worship resources written by Methodist Women in Britain and published by the Publishing team, are now in print and available to order on the Methodist Publishing website ([Easter Offering 2024 \(methodistpublishing.org.uk\)](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk)), and also listed on our website at [Easter Offering \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk): The theme of this year's Easter Offering service is 'Let Justice Roll'. The service tells the stories of people standing for justice, persisting in the face of setbacks and taking up the challenge anew as circumstances change, with examples that show how people now have hope

because justice 'rolled' into their lives. All donations to the Easter Offering collections go to support the World Mission Fund.

- 10 The second Fellowships and language diverse Festival of Music and Food took place at the end of October 2023 - [Hidden Treasures and Hidden Talents - The Cultures and Languages Festival of Music and Food \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk). For the first time, the over 20 years old Francophone congregation which meets at Peckham Methodist Church participated in the gathering.
- 11 *Singing the Faith* Plus continues to be an incredibly popular resource and one of the most visited parts of the Methodist website. The Ministries: Vocation and Worship team has been working hard to ensure it continues to resource worship well.
- 12 A celebration of chaplaincy was held with the President and Vice-President of the Conference affirming and giving thanks for the ministry of chaplains, with over 80 people attending online.
- 13 The new candidating and vocational discernment scheme is showing that it is more accessible to a broader range of people – both applicants/candidates and committee and group members involved in the processes. Reopening the Ministers of other Conferences and Churches (MOCC) processes fully from January will also broaden diversity in our ministry.
- 14 A key focus for the Ministries team this year is to explore how Local Preachers' Meetings can fulfil their potential as dynamic learning communities, equipping and resourcing those engaged in worship and preaching in a wide variety of contexts. Opportunities for ongoing learning form a major part of this, together with exploration of how our Standing Orders need to change to reflect a church focused on increasing diversity of missional opportunity. Areas of work in support of the work of local preachers (LPs) and worship leaders (WLs) include:
 - o Re-constitution of the Necessitous Local Preachers' Fund
 - o Work to reform Local Preachers' Meetings as learning communities for all involved in leading worship
 - o Establishment of the Ongoing Learning Hub for LPs and WLs
 - o Provision of more learning material for LPs and WLs in Welsh

LEARNING & CARING - We are an inclusive Church

- 15 The review of the Church's complaints and discipline process (Part 11) is making good headway. An external Complaints and Standards Consultant is working with the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice and other members of the Connexional Team to identify the key areas for improvement, including record-keeping, resolution of complaints at local level and alignment of the complaints and safeguarding processes. An update will be presented to the Council for consideration in a separate report elsewhere in the Agenda.
- 16 The World Mission Fund Grants Committee 2022-23 further agreed the dispersal of £500K in regional grants for Pacific based partners and anticipates that in January there will be agreement on approximately £2.4million (£130k in Mission Initiative and £2.3m in Capacity-building) in regional grants for our partners in Africa.
- 17 Solidarity grants have been agreed for partners in Pakistan, following attacks on Christian communities, and in Cameroon in response to recent violence.
- 18 Members of the Global Relationships team have attended the All-African Council of Churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches and have hosted meetings with visiting partners to share work with members of the Connexional Team.
- 19 Pastoral care for all mission partners and particularly employed lay mission partners this year is a large part of the work for Partnership Coordinators, in response to the Conference's adoption of Notice of Motion 2023/104. The normal consultation process will start between 29 January and 16 February 2024, with initial consultation meetings being held within that period. Affected employees will receive invitations to attend these meetings. The employees were invited to attend a pre-consultation briefing on 4 December 2023, the purpose of which was to share information about the process itself. Individual follow-up meetings were also offered to all employees at which they were invited to raise further questions and concerns about the process. The responses to these questions will be collated and shared with other employees via a Q&A, where they are relevant to all the individuals.

- 20** *Finding Nana*: The Publishing team has developed a co-publishing partnership with Methodist Homes (MHA) to publish a ground-breaking illustrated children's book, *Finding Nana*. This poignant story, written by children's author, Jenni Bacon, was designed primarily as a tool for MHA chaplains to help young relatives and their families to understand and manage the changes when an elderly relative moves into residential care. However, we hope it will also find a market among the many other adults seeking to explain to children why such care might be needed. Production was outsourced to Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), supported by our editorial team, and marketing and promotion will be led by MHA with the support of our Communications team, with a book launch in the spring.
- 21** The residential meeting of the leaders and coordinators of the Fellowships that took place in November 2023 tackled three areas:
- The JDS strategy: Bevan Powell explained why the Fellowships and culture and language diverse congregations are an important expression of the intentional inclusive practice of the Methodist Church.
 - Local Lay-Pastors: Some Fellowships and language congregations are supported by local lay-pastors who are qualified in their specific languages.
 - Dr Lia Shimada presented the plans for a piece of research led by the Susanna Wesley Foundation. The next residential meeting in May 2024 will receive the first report on the outcomes of the research.
- 22** 3Generate 2023 - this year's event was the largest 3Generate event to date. We had 1300 children and young people, with 26 Districts represented. 430 leaders accompanied the children and young people and approximately 50 Adults accompanied the 4-7s. The delivery team numbered 240, made up of volunteers from across the Connexion including Chairs, Superintendents and Connexional Team staff. We also had two Forces Chaplains and a Cliff College Team including students and staff. We put up some 963 tents for sleeping. We are currently in the debriefing, reviewing and feedback process. You can find the 3Generate 2023 video here: [3Generate 2023- Subtitled \(youtube.com\)](#)
- 23** Colleagues across the Connexional Team, including Ministries: Vocation and Worship, Learning Network and HR, have launched a new Line Managers' Handbook to complement training currently offered through the Learning Network to Line Managers across the Connexion.
- 24** Work is underway on the annual updates to the Superintendents' Handbook. The updated handbook will be available in early 2024.
- 25** Four introductory modules on Pastoral Care called 'Who Cares?', aimed at those involved in a variety of aspects of pastoral practice to encourage a caring culture in different contexts, are being produced. These modules were piloted with a group of over 50 people and are planned to be released later in the connexional year.

SERVICE - We are a justice-seeking Church

- 26** The Connexional Property Team (CPT) continues to provide a balance of support into central (ie, property under the managing trusteeship of a connexional committee) and wider connexional (ie, district, circuit and local church) property matters and projects. This includes the monthly publication of [Property Matters \(methodist.org.uk\)](#). Following rising energy costs and in line with the Action for Hope agenda, the CPT can now report that a specialist organisation, Switch 365, has been appointed to offer churches a broker service to ensure the best possible energy deals on the day of renewal of an energy contract, see Energy Buying [A-Z Property Guidance \(methodist.org.uk\)](#). Switch 365 is also working with the team to encourage churches to sign up to green energy where practical.
- 27** In recent months a number of property-related guidance documents has been published including: [Making Buildings Accessible \(methodist.org.uk\)](#); [Property Stewards Handbook 2023.pdf \(methodist.org.uk\)](#), and [Guidance On Closed Church Buildings 2023.pdf \(methodist.org.uk\)](#).
- 28** Whilst we continue to recruit a new Pensions Manager, the team has been busy supporting the Pension Trustee with the buy-in process for the Pension and Assurance Scheme for Lay Employees of the Methodist Church (PASLEMC). This has included checking lots of data so that the buy-in process can run as smoothly as possible.
- 29** After a considerable period of development, the IT team was able finally to launch the new connexional database. In the initial phase, this means all contact information is now accessible through Dynamics

365, a Microsoft product that dovetails with existing key IT systems. In subsequent phases, more functionality will be added allowing the old in-house database to be retired. The team is also engaging with a stakeholder group of ministers on the replacement for the methodist.org.uk e-mail system.

- 30 The Front of House team continues to work hard liaising with our landlord at Church House Westminster to ensure the temporary office space is as functional as it can be for the team. Whilst there remains some disturbance from the refurbishment going on around us, the level of disruption has reduced.
- 31 The focus of the Finance team has been on the production of the annual accounts. This process continues to run relatively smoothly with positive feedback received from the auditors. Further work is required to ensure the 'consolidated entities' are fully engaged in the process. The Team has also implemented a new process that will allow for the reporting of the carbon impact of connexionally-funded travel.
- 32 Warm Welcome Spaces opened their doors again for winter 2023, many of them based in Methodist churches. Whilst there is no connexional funding of Warm Spaces this year, the Connexional Team continues to co-ordinate with ChurchWorks to share opportunities and news. Currently 252 Warm Welcome Spaces are affiliated with Methodist churches, the second largest number of all the partner organisations. Research into last year's initiative found that combatting loneliness and social isolation was considered the most valuable benefit to those who attended.
- 33 *Let's End Poverty*, the anti-poverty movement supported by the Methodist Church, hosted its first Assembly on 14 October, with over 180 people attending in person and online. Six out of nine regional gatherings were hosted by Methodist churches across the UK. Since then, *Let's End Poverty* has begun to build momentum with nearly 600 people signed up to be part of the movement, and monthly online 'Action Gatherings' taking place. Partners within the movement are planning ahead of 2024 and the anticipated General Election, with the goal of making poverty a primary issue around the election. Individuals and Churches are invited to participate in planning and mobilising at <https://letsendpoverty.co.uk>.
- 34 Since the Conference adopted the report, *A Justice-seeking Church*, work has been going on to embed the recommendations of the report throughout the Connexion. A strategy for taking this work forward is to be found at MC/24/7, and there are already emerging examples of co-creation between churches, districts and the Connexional Team, including a Bible study, preaching resources around the Principles for Justice, and the sharing ideas of justice-seeking at local mission events.
- 35 Global Topic Network conversations on the topic of 'Land Rights' bringing together practitioners and theologians from partners are due to take place early in 2024.
- 36 Encounter Worldwide participant, Phoebe Parkin, is flying to Colombia in December to take up her volunteer placement with CEPALC, an ecumenical grassroots consultation and human rights organisation.
- 37 With a General Election on the horizon, this will be an important year for the Churches' engagement with politics and public issues. The Joint Public Issues Team's (JPIT) work plan, approved by the partner Churches' representatives who constitute JPIT's oversight Strategy & Policy Group, reflects this with three linked priorities for the year, as well as the significant and ongoing task of resourcing good engagement with justice issues across our Churches:
 - campaigning on poverty
 - equipping participation in the election process
 - launching the 'Constituency Action Network', encouraging and enabling fruitful relationships between local churches and their political representatives.
- 38 In November, JPIT organised a Church Leaders' Event in Parliament in order to deepen church leaders' understanding about why and how we work together on public issues and political engagement and how they can engage. The President of the Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, chaired a panel discussion with MPs from four different political parties, and participants engaged in roundtable discussions, before touring Parliament. The conversation focused on why Christians should engage with politics to seek justice and bringing about change, and how local churches can play an effective role in the political process, particularly when it comes to members raising issues that are important to them with MPs.

- 39 The Methodist Policy Advisers working within JPIT also support the Methodist Church's distinctive response on policy matters. The Methodist Church's response to the conflict in Gaza has been a primary concern since 7 October, working with the Revd David Hardman, the Methodist Liaison Officer, Jerusalem, and the Communications team. This has included preparing briefings on this complex conflict and agreeing appropriate participation in joint statements, working with other church leaders and support organisations such as Christian Aid, as, for example, with the recent call for a ceasefire: [Only a full ceasefire will deliver aid safely and effectively, Christian leaders say – Christian Aid | Mediacentre](#)
- 40 Staff in the Ministries team, the Conference Office and the Mission team have done considerable work in relation to the MOCC process and to request from the Methodist Churches in Ghana and Nigeria nominations for the replacement of the present Chaplains to the respective Fellowships. Interviews took place at the end of November 2023, leading to two recommendations for stationing on a 25% - 75% basis (Fellowship/Circuit) for the Ghanaian and a 50% - 50% basis for the Nigerian Fellowship.
- 41 The collaborative work between the Methodist Church Ghana and the MCB regarding the creation of language diverse congregations under the discipline of the MCB and linked with the MC Ghana formed the basis of a study-case presented at the World Methodist Council Conference in Manilla, Philippines, on Migrant Church. This was the second Conference of this type. The first one was hosted by the MCB in 2019. A Statement can be found in the following link: [A Statement of the Second Consultation on Migration of the World Methodist Council - World Methodist Council](#)
- 42 Work is progressing well with Place for Hope in shaping the integrated Positive Working Together and Reconciliation and Mediation Team project. Members of the Learning Network shared in a joint meeting with Place for Hope on 5-6 December to plan further developments in the five year project. This work links in with and supports a number of areas of our work as the Methodist Church in being an inclusive, justice-seeking, evangelistic and growing church.
- 43 The work of Action for Hope continues towards the target of net zero by 2030, with a full progress report coming before the Council in April. Conversations with districts and circuits have proved fruitful in establishing the nature of guidance which would be useful, and close co-operation with the Connexional Property Team has resulted in progress in the provision of support in making net zero modifications. The provision of funding to churches, circuits and districts for this purpose (elsewhere on the Agenda) will support these aims.
- 44 Further embedding of carbon reduction measures within the Connexional Team has taken place, with regular communication undertaken, and an initial cohort having completed Carbon Literacy Training. The key message of these approaches is that the journey to net zero will impact on the work of everyone within the Connexional Team, but that this presents opportunities as well as challenges.

EVANGELISM - We are an evangelistic people

- 45 There was a successful visit of young people from the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas who attended 3Generate 2023 and also experienced a district visit in Birmingham.
- 46 The World Mission Fund is being used to fund the placement of an evangelist from the Methodist Church in Italy with Methodist Church in Ireland in Dublin.
- 47 For the Evangelism and Growth team, this season has been a time of reflecting and reviewing the events we engaged with in summer 2023 and planning and discernment for events and festivals in 2024, hoping next year to expand the portfolio of secular events into some different cultural spaces. As well as preparing for next year, the team also supported 3Generate with Hope and Anchor, a cafe space for faith conversations for children and young people, and the autumn Community of Evangelists residential took place on the theme of evangelism and wellbeing.
- 48 The Ministries team working with the Learning Network and Evangelism and Growth teams continues to explore the relationship between *God For All* and chaplaincy and held an online event about discipleship in chaplaincy contexts which was well-attended and inspired some interesting theological conversations. The team is now developing a research project into chaplaincy and discipleship which will include theological reflections for helping chaplains and the church learn.

- 49 The Management Committee of the Modern Art Collection has produced its 'annual' report. This is a review of the past three years: the conservation programme, against the backdrop of the COVID pandemic, and relaunching the Collection and restarting touring: [mmac-ar23-final-singles-copy.pdf \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/mmac-ar23-final-singles-copy.pdf)
- 50 Two major exhibitions of works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection are planned for early 2024: *Deepening the Mystery – Unexpected treasures of art*, 1 March – 7 April, at the Focolare Centre for Unity, Welwyn Garden City; and *New Vision*, 19 May – 13 June, as part of celebrations for the opening this September of the Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne. Meanwhile, discussions are well underway for works to feature in the next UK City of Culture, Bradford 2025. More details about the immersive art presentation and the forthcoming exhibitions are available in the latest Friends' newsletter: [mmac_2311_print.pdf \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/mmac_2311_print.pdf)
- 51 Updates relating to *God For All* are shared in three key areas:

Centred in God: Discipleship and a Methodist Way of Life:

- Prayer: The last update to the Council featured the launch of the *Sunshine and Showers* prayer course. Work is now underway on a counterpart to it, using the same format, which will look at six paradoxes of the Bible. We hope a final course on Worship will complete the trilogy.
- MWOL: A refreshed series of service plans that cover the twelve stations of *A Methodist Way of Life* will shortly be published online. This new series builds on the first generation and adds creative activities, discussion questions and more to encourage interactive exploration in congregations.
- MWOL: Young people at *3Generate 2023* collected a set of twelve *Methodist Way of Life* magnets when they visited the different venues and engaged in the various spiritual practices. The giant spinning wheel from Conference was placed in the Town Square, and this provided a base for hundreds of conversations with the young people about what they had done and how they had met with God.

New Places for New People (NPNP) and Church at the Margins:

- Church Planting Intensive (CPI): In its third year of delivery, all pioneers employed in a funded NPNP have attended or will attend the course, as will other pioneers and their teams from across the Connexion seeking support for fruitfulness in their new communities. Eighty people have signed up since it began. Details of CPI are available here methodist.org.uk/cpi.
- Faith Rooted Community Organising: A key part of fruitful new Christian communities is the ability to be listen and connect with its context. So far, 78 people have registered for three courses, with further courses being offered in spring 2024. Details of the courses can be seen here methodist.org.uk/organising.
- Funding for circuits: The Circuit-based NPNP Guide, together with templates and forms, is available here methodist.org.uk/circuitnnpnfunding. It is designed for circuit leaders wanting to understand the funding process, as well as offering an introduction to the theology and core practices of beginning a NPNP that will support the discernment of a vision for a new community. Districts are now able to submit their NPNP oversight process to facilitate local approval of circuit funding submissions. Individual letters have also been sent to all districts inviting them to receive copies of the Guide for use in every circuit.
- Funding for districts: 17 districts have launched their funded NPNPs and four circuit-based NPNPs have started with the support of second phase funding. The Mission Committee will receive further NPNP submissions in February. Approved projects are added to this web page methodist.org.uk/nnpndistricts.
- Methodist Pioneering Pathways: The community of pioneers continues to meet locally, as the number of NPNPs increases in districts. The community also meets online twice a month, once for mutual support and once for theological reflection led by a pioneer leader or influential thinker. The growing community is made up of over 120 diverse pioneers, ordained and lay. Details of the Pathways are available here methodist.org.uk/mpp.
- NPNP Fruitfulness Research: Dr Heather Major was appointed to the jointly-funded post of Research Fellow in NPNP. The role will seek to unearth the hidden treasure of the funded NPNPs that the whole Methodist Church to learn from and build upon. She has met with the NPNP Guiding Team, district NPNP activists and is currently refining the research scope and methodology.
- Starting Churches at the Margins Resources: 'A Beginning a Church at the Margins' resource (on this page methodist.org.uk/cam-training) has been available since April 2023. It was developed by

experienced CaM practitioners and supports those seeking to develop new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people. Twenty people have attended this training.

- Superintendency and Pioneering: The Superintendent's role remains vital in the wider vision for a NPNP in every circuit. There will be four more of the popular webinars for Superintendents over the next year. The first took place in October 2023 to launch the Circuit-based NPNP Guide. The next webinar is focused on new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people. The webinar details are on this page methodist.org.uk/npnphubwebinars.

Every Church Growing and Transformational Leadership:

- Coaching: A survey of pioneers and missional leaders who were coached in the 2022/23 connexional year revealed that the impact of coaching is overwhelmingly positive. An Evangelism & Growth officer and a Learning Network colleague completed training with the Team Coaching Studio in autumn 2023, and have plans to offer training to Learning Network colleagues and the Children Youth and Families team in January/February 2024, in order to build coaching more into the fabric of the long-term connexional offering.
- Rural Solidarity Circles: As part of a wider piece of work alongside JPIT, Action for Hope and EDI, the team is gathering indications of interest from any passionate rural folk who maybe feel unheard at connexional level and would appreciate the opportunity to add their voice of lived experience into wider connexional policy.
- Rural Mission & Ministry 2.0 network: There is a new termly online gathering for previous 'graduates' of the Rural Ministry Course, delving further each session into a current rural mission and ministry topic (such as #community #justice #parables #people #outdoors) and exploring together as leaders through a rural and ecumenical lens. There will also be space for mutual encouragement and updates.

In Closing

- 52 Work continues at 25 Tavistock Place with the heavy phase of construction having commenced early in January following all the final approvals from Camden Council. The timeline for the programme has slipped due to these delays and we are now looking at summer 2024 for the completion on the new Methodist Church House.
- 53 As always the Council is invited to engage with the Team on any areas it has concerns about through the Connexional Secretary at any time.

*****RESOLUTION**

8/1. The Council receives the report.