

Report from the Connexional Team

MC/23/2

Date of meeting	25 th -26 th January 2023
Contact name and details	Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary, swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	To note
Resolutions	2/1. 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 the Methodist Council Objectives.
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- 1 This report provides the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to the Methodist Council Objectives since the last report in October 2022.
- 2 The work of the Connexional Team towards the Methodist Council Objectives is shared under the headings below.

Proclaiming the Gospel through worship/ The ministry of the whole people of God in the life of the World

- 3 Working with the Ministries Team, the Publishing Services team is systematically reformatting and uploading the content from the Methodist Worship Book where the Church owns the rights to do so as electronic/online versions; most recently, this was for the Covenant Service (in English and in Welsh). In addition, the 'Alternative MWB Liturgies' have also been published, but as online only from the outset.
- 4 Following the end of the current version of Worship: Leading & Preaching all students are now using version 3 of the course. Ministerial Development Review has now been relaunched with new materials, to enable the scheme to better complement Reflective Supervision. Preparation for implementation of the new scheme for candidating continues, with work on recruiting accompanists and the writing of Explore materials. New resources on the Methodist website for Local Lay-Pastors were available at the end of 2022.
- 5 The Bible Month book for 2023 is Revelation. This particular enigmatic text was chosen because of its pedagogical potential: most people appreciate that they don't understand it and so are more open to learning about how to engage with it better. In giving them the skills to read, interpret and appreciate Revelation, we will provide them with good biblical literacy skills in general. The Learning Network team has worked with Helen Morris from Moorlands College and Gary Hall from the Queen's Foundation on the 30 Days booklet. There are additional small group sessions planned, all-age worship suggestions and further resources materials have all been produced by members of the Connexional Team. A training day for Local Preachers and Worship Leaders will take place in mid-March 2023; this will be run as a hybrid event. Work is underway to produce a 30-Day Reading Guide and Bible Journaling Kit to encourage people to engage with the text for themselves, and a general guide for churches and circuits on how to make the most of Bible Month. The plan is to produce a series of short animations for churches to make use of in services and on social media. The Digital Communication team are also working assisting to build a social media and marketing strategy for the campaign. The aim is to grow the level of engagement with the Bible Month campaign beyond the 40% of circuits who engaged in some way last year.
- 6 The Biblical Study Day Webinar with Professor Robin Baker, mentioned in the October Council report, was held on 12 November 2022 and was a great success with over 200 people attending. The event was run as a hybrid event with the main session hosted at Wesley's Chapel, London and satellite

venues at Walkden Methodist Church, as a northern site, and Lutterworth Methodist Church as a midlands site and also accessible online via YouTube.

A Church for all people/ The Inclusive Church

- 7 Publishing Services continue to supply on request accessible versions of key products, such as Chinese translations of the membership ticket. A new memorandum of understanding has been signed with the Torch Trust, including to allow for the creation and distribution of items in braille that we might not normally produce. The Design team is taking courses in what is currently considered best practice in creating accessible layout, given the diversity of presenting needs and sometimes conflicting advice on how to respond best. The Director of Engagement is contributing to discussions on providing a consistent 'baseline' menu of accessible versions of all publications, on top of which we will consider individual requests for one-off products/needs.
- 8 3Generate - this year's event had a wide and varied programme on offer to attendees:
 - Sessions covered a range of topics such as war and reconciliation, LGBT issues, identity, wellbeing and social justice issues. Worship and faith exploration were key parts of the event, with a range of ways to engage spiritually, through singing, art, sports, performing arts, technology and discussion. There were also opportunities to capture children and young people's views and opinions. The programme was designed to be as accessible and diverse as possible to enable all to participate. A dedicated Sensory Space venue was led by the Additional Needs team and was well used over the weekend, in addition to accessibility measures being in place across all venues and within the different aspects of the programme.
 - Elections took place both during and after 3Generate for the Youth President and Youth Reps roles. A new team of 13 Youth Reps is now in place to represent children and young people at a variety of meetings and events.
 - This year, 252 people were part of the volunteer team, including a new stream intentionally aimed at 18-25 year olds who were able to serve as well as participating in peer group sessions. Volunteering is an area of ongoing significant development with an emphasis on exploring calling and vocation as well as ensuring people of all abilities are able to find their place on the team.
 - A comprehensive feedback and evaluation took place following the event. As part of this process views and comments were sought from children and young people, their group leaders, volunteers and venue leads. Their responses are currently being explored to identify aspects for development and improvement. They will be incorporated into planning for 3Generate 2023.
- 9 Intergenerational Church - during autumn 2022, we piloted a new learning series online exploring intergenerational church and community, 'Walking Together'. The series comprised three short webinars with learning input, conversation and action points for mission and ministry. It has been a collaborative piece of work with members of the Children, Youth and Family (CYF) team, Evangelism and Growth team, the Learning Network and District colleagues. This course will inform further development through 2023.
- 10 Work on reviewing the Reconciliation and Mediation Team project is planned over the next few months with a report due to be presented to Methodist Council in March with recommendations on how best to go forward with this work.
- 11 The new mandatory Unconscious Bias and EDI modules have now been launched on MCBX (based on TheologyX), our online learning platform. The newly established EDI Training Group, with representatives from the JDS Committee, Learning Network, EDI Officers and our EDI Advisor will formally review the material in 6 months' time.

God's Church in God's world/ Striving for Justice and Peace

- 12 Methodists for Ukraine (www.methodist.org.uk/methodistsforukraine) has launched with a sign-up form on the Methodist website and Methodist hosts have already begun offering their homes. Promotional materials have been sent out across the Connexion, and briefings have been given to leaders in each district. The project has undergone a thorough process to ensure that safeguarding is as robust as possible. Progress on making the first matches with Ukrainian refugees is underway.

- 13 The Joint Public Issues Team coordinated an interfaith conversation on technology, rearmament and disarmament held in Central Hall Westminster, hosted by Anthony Boateng, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, and featuring a keynote presentation from the Revd Dr JC Park, President of the World Methodist Council. The meeting heard a call for a fourth Special Session on Disarmament to be established by the United Nations General Assembly.
- 14 At the beginning of November, JPIT, along with the Salvation Army and the Quakers held a Church Leaders day in Parliament. Each denomination invited five leaders to attend, who in turn invited their MP. The day consisted of policy presentations by the staff of the denominations, a panel of MPs tackling the question of faith involvement in Politics, a service and a tour of Parliament.
- 15 A joint response to COP27 was drafted by JPIT and signed by Baptist, Methodist and URC leaders welcoming the Loss and Damage fund but calling on leaders to recognise that there is still much to do to avoid irreparable damage to God's creation.
- 16 The work on the economy and the cost of living crisis continues to be a major part of JPIT's work. As well as responding to the Autumn Statement, the team is developing a longer-term anti-poverty campaign building on the successful drawing together of faith groups and anti-poverty charities in the summer. JPIT have coordinated the production of Advent resources reflecting on Luke 1:53 'He has filled the hungry with good things' in the context of the cost of living crisis.
- 17 Three focus groups and several one-to-one meetings were held by JPIT listening to more than 15 churches in different contexts across the UK for a new proposed church engagement project. Currently entitled Church in Every Constituency the project aims for increased political participation at a local constituency level through the deepening of relationships with MPs. The aim of the focus groups was to hear from a wide sample of churches as to how our proposals would work in their particular situations. A pilot scheme will now be rolled out in the new year.
- 18 After reviewing the Faith in Politics Podcast, JPIT took the decision to stop producing the monthly episode and instead concentrate on a shorter more frequent podcast to reflect on current political issues. '10 Minutes On...' focuses on a current issue; in the last couple of months these have included Scottish Independence, COP27, the Autumn Statement, World Toilet Day, Loss and Damage, Challenge Poverty Week, and Modern Day Slavery. The JPIT Politics in the Pulpit podcast continues to provide a weekly in depth look at the set lectionary passages to encourage and inspire preachers to tackle current social justice issues in the pulpit.
- 19 JPIT, working with local Methodists in the Newcastle District involved in offering Warm Welcomes, produced an Advent Candle campaign that encouraged MPs to visit and listen to those using the warm spaces. The campaign encouraged people to send their MP an Advent Candle as a symbol of hope, asking that they do all that they can to ensure that no one ever needs to rely on a public building to provide them with warmth. There is also an invitation to come to the warm space to hear the lived experience of guests.
- 20 The Walking with Micah project held a consultation in November on emerging findings and recommendations. About 60 people, from various roles in districts, circuits and churches, took part in discussions around the proposed key priorities for justice, and ways in which the outcomes of the project might be embedded across the Connexion. Consultations are continuing with stakeholders in advance of the draft report going to Mission Committee in January.
- 21 The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse - the Inquiry's final report was delivered at the height of the recent turbulence in government nevertheless there was still quite a lot of press interest on the day of publication. It remains to be seen how the government might respond to the recommendations and there is a six month period in which it has to do this. Please see the Safeguarding website for the Church's response to the report and our ongoing commitment to continue our process of becoming more responsive to the voices and needs of victims and survivors as we move forward.

Evangelism / God For All

- 22 In the third year of God for All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth, the Evangelism and Growth team notes the following new updates in each of the God for All streams as well as a way for individuals to offer feedback on the strategy so far. The headings of each stream are listed below with updates under each.
- 23 Centred in God: Discipleship:
 - Bible Month: as mentioned previously this project aims to develop biblical literacy in the church:

- A Methodist Way of Life at 3Generate: As part of a longer-term collaboration with the CYF team, A Methodist Way of Life was brought to 3Generate this year. The young people were encouraged to choose up to three commitments through which they 'tuned in' to God, and to consider how they would continue this exploration in their home churches. This was assisted through the communion and worship services, as well as an interactive activity in the Town Square and a take home resource (in partnership with All We Can). Talks have now begun on how MWOL can thread through 3Generate 2023.

24 Everyone an Evangelist: Evangelism, Digital Evangelism, Young Evangelists:

- Evangelism for Leaders course: In autumn 2022, we have rewritten the popular Evangelism for Leaders online course to bring it in line with a Methodist Way of Life and ensure our resourcing across the God for All strategy is well integrated.
- Festivals engagement: We look forward to the final package of resources for Methodists engaging missionally at Pride events launching in February and with colleagues in JDS, we are exploring the possibility of supporting Methodists engaging missionally at Carnival events (the street festivals celebrating Caribbean and African-diaspora identity and heritage) in a similar way.
- Digital evangelism: The digital evangelism work has been progressing with the building of a community of practice of digital communicators from across the Connexion, drawing together a wide variety of individuals who are involved in different forms of communication or digital work. The next phase exploring digital New Places for New People has begun with conversations being undertaken with interested districts and preparation for piloting in 2023.
- Young Evangelists: The Young Evangelism Officer was involved in planning and hosting the worship services for the weekend at 3 Generate, has led on a young adult's weekend retreat, has started visiting young people across the Connexion, and is continuing to pilot the Explore Evangelism resource aimed at young people exploring evangelism in their contexts.

25 New Places for New People and Church at the Margins:

- Districts and circuits starting New Places for New People (NPNP): NPNP staff continue to work with all the districts to shape NPNPs. It is encouraging to see that some of the early tranche districts are enabling circuits to accessing funding for the next phase of the NPNP funding. www.methodist.org.uk/npnptranches Details of the district NPNP funded projects can be found here: www.methodist.org.uk/npnpdistrictprojects
- Resourcing the NPNP Movement: Over 100 people attended the last series of NPNP webinars. The online events are a mix of a general introduction on how to begin and more focused content in specific areas, such as the role of Superintendents or the opportunities in new housing. The second Church Planting Intensive course has begun for those pioneering an NPNP. The hybrid course is supporting 20 people planting in diverse contexts across the church.
- Beginning a Church at the Margins online courses: Alongside a three-session introductory online course we are partnering with Crucible to deliver the six-session 'On the Edge' online course for practitioners and advocates. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/training-courses/>
- Social Justice and Evangelism Webinars: A series of webinars in 2022/23 to discuss the deep intersection between social justice and evangelism. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/social-justice-and-evangelism-webinars-2022-23/>
- Faith Rooted Community Organising: A two-year pilot project is underway to develop 'Faith Rooted Community Organising' courses and resources, in partnership with Birmingham and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury districts. Eddie Aigbe has been appointed as the Regional Congregational & Community Organiser.

26 Every Church Growing and Transformational Leadership:

- Rural mission update: A collaborative project is underway to develop missional resources and a supportive network for small churches, both rural and urban, particularly those considering their viability. This includes working with colleagues across the Connexional Team (Learning Network, Property Support, Law and Polity) to scope and build a resource bank with examples of those

places already creatively engaging with SO 605A and some potential models for those considering their options.

- Mission planning: Following conversations with the Learning Network Co-ordinators and District Missioner Community, there are plans to trial a Connexion-wide digital mission planning day in summer 2023. The need for more skilled facilitators to guide churches and circuits through mission planning also came out of these conversations: an idea is in development for recruiting and training mission consultants.
- Transformational Leadership Learning Community (TLLC): Feedback from those teams who commit to the TLLC reveals how effective the process can be, but it involves a significant investment of time: this puts some teams off and results in other teams' commitment lessening throughout the year. We are exploring ways of making some aspects of the TLLC open to a wider group to widen the impact and to aid recruitment of new teams.

27 Church-wide feedback on God for All:

- In the third year of God for All, we want to hear from circuits, churches, and individuals about what has been helpful and what needs more work as the Methodist Church continues to engage and embed the commitments of God for All. There are two ways for people to offer feedback now, which can be shared widely across the circuits and churches. Diverse responses and wisdom will help the Methodist Church continue to learn and stay focused on the long-term cultural change God is calling us to. The two ways of gathering feedback are:
 - Online Survey: Individuals can [click here](#) to access a short survey to give individual feedback. There are 20 questions in total, and it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The more the participation, the better, so there is an invitation to share the link widely.
 - Online Focus Groups: [Click here](#) to sign up for one of 30 online small group conversations that will be hosted in January and February. These spaces are for different roles and groups to offer specific local feedback – celebrations, challenges, and big questions for the future. The link enables the user to see the entire series of facilitated conversations.
- There will also be feedback conversations hosted at the 2023 Superintendents Conferences and 2023 Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation.

Resources for the Church: the use of God's gifts

- 28 The Connexional Property team has recently provided increasing support to colleagues and Trustees on Connexional property projects, alongside its continuing work with local churches. Two key updates are the completion of the project to convert Camden Town Methodist Church into a new worship centre and Wesley hotel in late November and the completion of the tendering process for Tavistock Place at a similar time. Along with a number of other connexional properties, this accounted for 22% of the team's work. Broadly, other support at local levels included 3% to Districts, 8% to Circuits, 33% on churches considering new mission and development, 14% on churches considering site development and new church projects and the remaining resources spread across property sales, future plans, building alterations and a new church building.
- 29 As reported to the last Council, the Property Development Committee continues to focus on discussions and reviews of our property in a missional context, alongside supporting guidance for the closing of church buildings, net zero targets and the impact of energy costs on church buildings. The team has also started its annual support and collaboration with District Property colleagues through online and face to face training events with a successful event in Manchester, which was very well attended and gave great opportunities for sharing of knowledge and learning.
- 30 The support needed to manage the portfolio of connexional manses is increasing and the Team is taking on more of the work. We are examining the best way for the portfolio to be well managed as well as thinking ahead to the energy rating commitments that need to be met. In line with this initial work it has been felt critical for clarity to be brought to the process of how manses are offered to any ministers being offered an appointment in the Team. The principles around this are:
- a) A manse must be provided for a minister taking full-time time appointments in the Connexional Team (SO 803(1)(a)), and this is the responsibility of the Methodist Council through the Connexional Manse Committee.

- b) Interviewees are invited to view the manse either before interview or between interview and accepting the post if successful. A manse therefore must have been designated for the post prior to advertisement. Following the Council decision (see MC/22/11), only in exceptional circumstances should a minister be appointed and other accommodation offered if s/he is not willing to live in the manse provided.
 - c) For a part-time post, if the minister is contributing the remainder of their time to the local Circuit, it is expected that the Circuit would [continue to] provide a manse, and the Connexional Manse Committee would come to a suitable arrangement for reimbursement. However even if the minister is not using the remainder of their time for the Church, the Methodist Council is still obliged to provide a manse if the post is 50% or more (implied in SO 803(1)(a)).
 - d) If a complementary Circuit or church appointment where a suitable manse is not available, the manse arrangements become the responsibility of the Methodist Council through the Connexional Manse Committee.
- 31** Over £60,000 from the World Mission Fund has been given in Solidarity Grants to Partners since the beginning of the 2022/2023 connexional year. These have been in the form of help with stipends and wages in Uganda; help to drill a bore-hole in a part of Tanzania facing drought; flood damage repair at the Theological College in Pakistan; training for the new connexional leadership in Zimbabwe; and support for work among Russians fleeing into Georgia. Monies are also being distributed from the Joint MCB-All We Can Appeals to Partner Churches as well as aid agencies working to bring relief and support to those impacted by the floods in Pakistan and those working among Ukrainians emigrating because of the war.
- 32** The Safeguarding team and the Mission Partners working with global Safeguarding support are developing a template to support the Global Relationships team in following-up appropriately when global Partners disclose safeguarding concerns on grant applications from the World Mission Fund.
- 33** Plans are progressing well with revising the Advanced Module of safeguarding training for its April 2023 release. As members of the church are required to refresh their training every four years we revise the courses to take account of new legislation, research, good practice and related developments.
- 34** Two more webinars have been hosted with the first directed at District Safeguarding Officers on the subject of the latest research in relation to child sexual abuse and the second relating to domestic abuse with a series of presentations on hidden victims. We were pleased to be joined by Jess Phillips MP, the shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding.
- 35** The Communications team has been concentrating on the launch of the Christmas film 'There is Room' which went online at the end of November. There was a good response to the film, with 16,000 views in the first 48 hours and an overwhelmingly positive reaction on social media. The campaign is continuing with supporting resources including blogs, other films and material with partner organisations such as Action for Children, MMHS and MHA. There will be a fuller breakdown of the impact of the campaign in January. You can find the link to the film on the front page of the website.
- 36** The printed resources for 'There is Room' were made available with only postage and packing to pay, and have proven popular, with positive feedback on their look, content and value in pre-Christmas planning. Initial print runs were:
- Leaflet: 100,000 in 5,000 batches of 20
 - Postcards: 60,000 in 3,000 batches of 20
 - Poster: 3,000
- By the end of November, we needed to reprint to meet demand:
- Leaflet: 60,000 in 3,000 batches of 20
 - Postcard: 40,000 in 2,000 batches of 20
- 37** The Communications team has also supported many connexional colleagues with media advice over the past couple of months, writing statements for journalists and helping set up interviews. One such interview we supported with was featured on BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme looking at 'wayside pulpits' and featured Leyland Road Methodist Church, Southport. We have also facilitated other national radio appearances including the Chaplain General, Mike Parker who gave the *Pause for Thought* on BBC Radio 2's Zoe Ball show on Remembrance Day and the Director of Evangelism and Growth, Trey Hall, who has also been delivering *Pause for Thought* on Zoe Ball's show throughout December.

- 38 Work is continuing to scope out a new website design and to rationalise the number of social media accounts held in the Connexional Team.
- 39 The Pension and Finance teams worked intensively on providing support to the Pension Trustees when the Liability Driven Investment market was put under strain in the wake of the 'mini-budget'. Cash was provided to the trustees and this prevented an unnecessary pension deficit arising.
- 40 Discussions with the Pension Trustees continued across a range of issues given the very different circumstances the pension schemes now face. Planning for the 2023 Valuation is already under discussion, including reflecting on the lessons learned from the previous negotiations.
- 41 The new connexional database has entered 'user acceptance testing' with training on the new system planned for the new year. Other new systems are in development including Safeguarding, digital asset management, and options for the ministers' email system are being explored. A large project is nearing completion to move all the physical server infrastructure off site into a commercial data warehouse with full backup provided from a second site. In upgrading much of the physical infrastructure, the main cyber security risks facing the Team have been addressed.
- 42 The Annual Report and Accounts were completed ahead of schedule and with only the most minor of comments from the External Auditors. Work is already well underway for the forthcoming budget-setting process.
- 43 The annual District Treasurer Forum was held in October with presentations from Chapel Aid and the Central Finance Board. Discussion was had concerning the longer term financial position, the level of the Assessment, pensions issues, and property sales.
- 44 The Learning Network continues to develop a number of its work areas that can be offered across the Connexion. Information on these events can be found on the Methodist Church website at: [Learning Network Courses](#). A pdf booklet with this information will be available early in the New Year along with a number of printed copies available for distribution within the Learning Network regions.
- 45 Members of the Conference Office have been working on finding suitable centres for the meetings of the Conference in 2024 and 2025 and have visited possible venues outside the West Midlands.

Responding to the Gospel in partnership

- 46 The 2023 touring programme for the Methodist Modern Art Collection begins with Articles of Faith (Saturday 18 February – Saturday 8 April 2023) at Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol: www.vic-methodist-bristol.org.uk The Methodist church's organising team, supported by members of the MMAC Management Committee and the Connexional Team's Interfaith Officer, are working in close partnership local Jewish and Islamic communities to co-curate, exhibit and interpret art and artefacts from all three faiths.
- 47 Rather than engage in running 'fundraising campaigns', we are aiming to share the stories of the people, places and projects that are supported by our Funds, focussing first on the World Mission Fund with the following developments:
 - To make giving easier, we have updated the relevant webpages with a new 'support the church' red button on the Methodist Church website's homepage, a redesigned 'give' webpage and updated online information about all our funds.
 - In January, we are launching an animated video that explains what the World Mission Fund is and what the money helps to achieve. We are offering free posters for churches and will be sharing social media to raise awareness of the work supported by the World Mission Fund, plus offering a new online fundraising pack, and new JMA resources including a new JMA Commissioning Service and new edition of Rainbow magazine [rainbow-autumn-2022.pdf](#) (methodist.org.uk) The aim is to increase engagement, enthusiasm and learning around the work with our global Partners and as a result, encourage donations to the World Mission Fund.
- 48 The highly successful participation of young adults from The Evangelical Church of Spain at 3Generate has led to a deepening of links and the possibility of exchange visits in the future.
- 49 Two persons on Encounter Worldwide are in the stages of training and preparation, with placement for one with the Methodist Church in Namibia, supporting work to set up pre-schools and community

group work; there is a potential placement for the other in Georgia with the United Methodist Church serving families fleeing from Russia. Two more applications for Encounter Worldwide have been received.

- 50 Two persons have travelled from the Harare West District of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe to the East Anglia District as part of their twinning relationship, supported by the World Mission Fund. The offer to pay for up to two persons to visit each MCB District from the Partner Church with which the District has a formal twinning link to both further the twinning link and the District's Strategic Mission Plan, lasts until August 2024.
- 51 The Youth President has completed a successful visit, supported by the Partnership Co-ordinator for Asia-Pacific, to the Korean Methodist Church.
- 52 Our ecumenical engagement continues with recent developments in our conversations with the Roman Catholic Church. The Secretary of the Conference has attended a meeting in Taize about the Roman Catholic Synodal process and is working with others to encourage attendance at the gathering of the people of God in Rome in September/October next year. The Ecumenical Officer and others will contribute to the papers for a Symposium on the Synodal Process in Durham in June, although the dates clash with the Conference so the opportunities for Methodists to engage are limited.
- 53 Plans are in hand for the first meetings of the Life in Covenant Group with the Church of England now that all appointments have been made.

In closing

- 54 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. At the time of writing the Team was in the last stages of the anticipated move from 25 Marylebone Road to our interim office space in Church House Westminster. It has been a heavy additional workload for the Team to clear and sort the building over these last months and we hope that that the move goes well.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 2/1. The Council receives the report.**