

Chapter 15 Praying for your New Place for New People/Church at the Margins

It is essential for your NPNP/CaM to be rooted, sustained and grown in prayer. As we listen to God together, we discern God's will and purpose for God's people. The theologian Simone Weil wrote, "Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer." Being attentive to God together centres us in God and enables us to discover our vision, values and purpose.

The pioneering team should:

- build prayer into the cycle and rhythm of all meetings
- form a prayer network and agree how and who will communicate prayer requests to others eg via email/ WhatsApp
- include an opportunity for people to share their concerns for prayer as individuals and for the community as a whole
- regularly pray for who could be invited to join in
- introduce different and creative forms of prayer eg Lectio Divina, music, art, writing, prayer walking, silence
- invite people in the pioneering team and across the larger Church and world to be intercessors for the NPNP/CaM.

Topics for prayer

The pioneering team should share regular updates from the NPNP for prayer (both the joys and the struggles). Include in your prayer times, a regular invitation for people to reflect on how God might be speaking to you/them about NPNP. Offer these topics of prayer:

- The pioneer and pioneering team
- Potential people who might engage
- The management group/line manager
- Practical issues: funding/buildings, etc.

Further resources

For more resources on prayer, visit the Methodist Way of Life prayer website: methodist.org.uk/Prayer

Chapter 16 How to Listen

As you listen, always be clear and honest about who you are as an NPNP and share how and why listening is an important and consistent part of your practice. From the beginning, plan how you will listen to the wider community as a regular part of your activities.

We listen to...

- value one another
- hear different voices and opinions learn about others
- hear their hopes, dreams, fears, challenges and concerns
- hear what people are proud of
- form and develop relationships
- break down perceived stereotypes and barriers between people.

Where to listen ...

- in the places people meet and gather: leisure centres, cafés, coffee shops, school gates, parks, community spaces, social media groups, community online forums, local interest gatherings, public noticeboards, etc
- while joining in with a community activity
- while volunteering for a charity or a foodbank

Listening to a community group by hosting an event

Be clear and honest about who you are and why you are hosting the event. Identify a shared concern or issue arising from the community/context and try to keep people focused on that without going off-topic.

Depending on the context, and how formal the event is, it might be helpful to set some guidance around listening well to each other, such as:

- Agreeing to be open to different opinions.
- Agreeing that only one person will speak at a time.
- Agreeing that everyone will participate.

After setting guidance, the three key elements for successful listening are: participation, positive questioning and reflection.

We listen to...

Be attentive to the words used.

Notice the volume and tone of the words.

Try to recognise and suspend your own assumptions and judgements.

When someone pauses and is silent, avoid rushing to fill the space.

What remains unspoken and seems to be unmentionable (the elephant in the room)?

Notice when something upsets you, or surprises you, and focus on listening rather than your own response.

Listen with the aim of understanding the other person. Use 'I' language when responding to someone.

Honour confidentiality.

Ask open-ended questions.

Signs you may not be listening well

You are busy thinking of your response.

You recognise yourself thinking, 'that's good' or 'that's bad'. Fidgeting, tapping your fingers, glancing at your watch. Avoiding eye contact.

You constantly feel the urge to interrupt.

You bring the conversation back to you! You don't ask any questions.

You quickly become defensive and want to speak. Your body language is closed and defensive.

You forget the name of the person you are talking to.

Chapter 17 Positive Working Together and Managing Conflict

In human relationships, conflict is to be expected, especially when people are experiencing change. The space to differ honestly in an atmosphere of grace and acceptance is the mark of a healthy community. Conflict becomes destructive when it is hidden or unresolved.

Experience shows that there have been tensions between pioneer initiatives and the wider Church. This is to be expected, for one of the gifts of NPNPs is that they can challenge assumptions about the way Christian community is expressed. A helpful Methodist Church resource is *Living with Contradictory Convictions* found at [Methodist.org.uk/ConferenceReports2006](https://www.methodist.org.uk/ConferenceReports2006)

Ready for conflict

As you begin your NPNP, it is important that you are ready for the conflict that is likely to arise and find patterns of handling it positively. This will enable difference to be a place of creativity that brings about growth and deepening of relationships: a moment that helps an NPNP be understood and integrated in the life of the wider church context. Here are some helpful procedures to put in place:

- Normalise practices that help more people share in community conversations. Encourage people to speak up, and support those who find it more challenging to speak. Sometimes this requires not speaking so that others have a chance.
- In situations where someone raises a conflict, be ready to listen to what the person wishes to share. To be heard is sometimes all someone needs.
- Do not look for immediate solutions or fixes. It is better to gather information and enable conversation that will bring people together.
- Facilitate different people working together in their tension rather than keep them apart.
- Enable mutual accountability: where both an NPNP and the wider church understand the importance of what is required of them and what is required of others to support them.
- Enable consistently good communication between key wider church leaders and the pioneering team. This is vital in preventing tensions from escalating. A small reflection shared early on means an issue won't become bigger than it needs to be.
- Acknowledge differences and affirm the value of people's perspectives to create a place where honest questions can be asked and answered.

Positive Working Together

Dealing well with conflict is not easy and many feel overwhelmed by the prospect. However, the skills can be learnt and the Methodist Church is committed to empowering leaders in this area. The Positive Working Together resources provide information and training to equip leaders in every context of the Methodist Church.

Resources and further information on training events can be found at methodist.org.uk/PWT