

Walking with Micah update

MC/22/82

Date of meeting	17-18 October 2022
Contact name and details	Rachel Lampard, Walking with Micah project lampardr@methodistchurch.org.uk Jude Levermore, Head of Mission Levermorej@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	For discussion
Resolution	82/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	This report updates the Council on the progress to date of the Walking with Micah project, and outlines the likely content of the report to the Methodist Conference in 2023.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking with Micah is a two-year project helping the Methodist Church to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking Church • The project comes at a time of great upheaval for society and the wider world, and when justice is embedded in the priorities of the Church • The project has involved conversations across the Connexion, as well as reflections on theology and history, and workshops at the Conference • The final report to the 2023 Conference will include: proposals on principles which underpin our understanding of God's justice; priority issues for the Methodist Church for the next 5 years; and practices to support us in our justice-seeking. • This report concludes by asking for reflections on two key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We aim to practice justice with humility, by being “with not for” people, through giving attention to power, and by committing to transformation. How can we encourage these ways of practising justice? ○ In what ways can local churches be helped by this report and not feel it is an additional burden?
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah/ MC/21/69 Report from the Connexional Team (para 20) – https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/23369/counc_oct-21_mc21-69-report-from-the-connexional-team.pdf MC/22/6 Report from the Connexional Team (para 18) – https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/24288/counc_jan_22-mc22-6-connexional-team-report-jb_jrh.pdf The 2022 Methodist Conference workshops.
Consultations	The Justice Conversations (January – June 2022) included responses from a range of individuals, churches, schools and communities Conversations with a wide range of Methodist organisations and networks

Summary of impact

Although this report itself will not have an impact, the report to the Council in March 2023 of the outcomes of the project will list the potential impacts.

Walking with Micah: justice-seeking and the Methodist Church – an update MC/22/82

- 1 Walking with Micah is a two-year project established in June 2021 with the aim of enabling the Methodist Church to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking Church. A wide range of conversations and research have taken place over the past year. A report will be brought to the Methodist Council in March 2023 through the Mission Committee, with a view to presenting a report to the Methodist Conference in 2023. This paper is to update Council members on the project so far and to indicate likely directions of travel within the report to Council and Conference. Questions and comments will be welcome.

The project so far

- 2 A commitment to justice is not a new undertaking for the Methodist Church. It was present in our founding as a denomination, and has been lived out in the lives of people called Methodist over the centuries since. Through care for those made vulnerable by society, through solidarity with those around the world experiencing oppression or poverty, through social action, political engagement, campaigning or purchasing power, Methodists have strived to act justly. Justice has been present in our hymns, our prayers and our discipleship, as we have responded to the love of God whose nature is just.
- 3 The needs of our country and world are great, particularly in the wake of austerity, Brexit disruptions, Covid, and now the cost of living crisis, with climate change, conflict and forced migration affecting the whole world. The Walking with Micah project aims to provide guidance on how the Church should respond, and what our calling is as disciples.
- 4 Justice is woven into the strategic direction of the Methodist Church. *Our Calling* and a Methodist Way of Life outline how the Methodist Church responds to the love of God, through practices that focus on worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism. Acting justly is a key part of this – most clearly in our service, but also in other areas, where themes of equality, incarnation, salvation and kingdom are central. The Walking with Micah project aims to provide guidance on how Methodists and the Methodist Church should seek God’s justice, given its centrality to our self-understanding and our priorities.
- 5 Over the past year, a range of people and groups have engaged with this question. At 3Generate 2021 around 200 children and young people gave their views on what were the most important issues and what should be done about them. A number of District Synods also spent time reflecting on what a just world looks like. With the launch of the Justice Conversations and associated resources, churches, groups and schools reflected on what justice looked like to them, and how injustice should be tackled. A number of groups with personal experiences of injustice were also invited to contribute from their experiences. Conversations were held with a number of Methodist entities, including the Central Finance Board, Methodist Homes and All We Can, listening to their experience as “justice-seeking organisations”, and hearing their priorities for justice.
- 6 In the summer a social media campaign was organised together with Methodist Heritage, inviting people to share pictures and stories of #MyJusticeJourney. This resulted in a successful twitter campaign which reached through and beyond the Church, and had people sharing personal testimonies of their justice-seeking faith journey, as well as hearing stories of Methodist organisations and heritage sites.
- 7 At the 2022 Methodist Conference, Conference members participated in ten workshops on the

emerging themes from the project, and provided extensive feedback on the proposals.

- 8 On 3 November, the President will be hosting an in-person consultation on the outputs of the project in central Birmingham. Further details can be found here <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/walking-with-micah-next-steps-for-justice-tickets-411964636317>
- 9 The project has been guided throughout by a reference group, chaired by the Revd Dr Roger Walton. Three accompanists, the Revd Dr Catrin Harland-Davies, the Revd Dr Mike Long and the Revd Dr Caroline Wickens, were appointed by the Faith and Order Committee and have met monthly to advise, discuss and reflect.

Looking ahead

- 10 The project will report to the Conference in 2023, and a draft of the report will come to the Methodist Council in March 2023 through the Mission Committee.
- 11 The expectation is that the report will offer an analysis of what being a justice-seeking Church looks like for Methodists. This will outline a Methodist theology of justice, examine the changing presence of justice in our hymns, and look at the threads of justice in our history, as well as how the Conference's enabling of the Church to speak and act for justice has changed over time. It will reflect on what matters to Methodists and Methodist communities and organisations now, and on how we act for justice and use our resources.
- 12 The project has developed a framework of "Principles, Priorities and Practices" to help guide future work.
- 13 The **principles** for justice offer an anchor in God's justice and suggest what this means for justice-seeking. These have been developed through conversations and with the Faith and Order accompaniers. It is hoped that these six principles will help people to articulate the Christian underpinning of their commitment to justice, as well as providing tools – to us as members, to Church leaders, to groups such as the Joint Public Issues Team – when we are called to speak or act. If these are agreed by the Conference, the intention is to provide materials, such as bible study or small group resources, to enable Methodists to engage with them. The working draft of a list of Principles is included at Appendix 1 for information; the final version may change.
- 14 The **priorities** for justice are intended to offer a focus for the Methodist Church. It does not mean that local communities should not identify local concerns or that the Church cannot respond to emerging issues. Instead, the hope is that having four or five key priorities will enable the Methodist Church to focus on what is "ours to do", rather than feeling we need to respond to every concern or demand. The priorities that will be proposed to the Conference will arise from listening to the concerns of Methodists, discernment of the resonances with our past as well as the gifts we have now, and insight into the injustices we face. Identifying priorities might mean, for example, a commitment to offer preaching or study resources for local churches, run a campaign with JPIT, or co-ordinate communication by the Church. There might be other opportunities to work through other Connexionally-funded work or with partner organisations.
- 15 The **practices** will offer ways in which we all can be more effective in our justice-seeking. The practices that will be suggested at the next Conference will focus on three areas. Firstly, the report will offer practices or disciplines which enable us to root our justice-seeking and activism in God. These can work as part of the Methodist Way of Life as a way of exploring our commitment to challenge injustice. Secondly, the report will suggest ways in which local churches can be justice-seeking, either in local situations or in solidarity with other communities and organisations. Thirdly, the report will suggest ways in which connexionally-funded work can support the priorities and help local churches. Some of this will affirm existing work, and some may suggest new emphases.
- 16 The full content of the report to the Conference and any resolutions are being developed this autumn and stakeholders are being consulted. The contents of the report will then be scrutinised by both the Mission Committee and the Council in the spring.

Some questions for discussion

- 17 How to encourage and develop best practice: Through the conversations and reflections during the project, it is apparent that there are some ways of working that enable us to be "at our best" when

engaging in justice-seeking. These are reflected in our theology, our history and how we talk about justice, and will be particularly helpful in framing our “practices”. They are shared here with the questions: **When do we notice these in our justice-seeking? How can we encourage these ways of practicing justice?**

- a. **With** – justice is about “being with” people rather than “working for” people. This involves communities making decisions together, people experiencing injustice having agency and dignity, and people standing in solidarity together.
 - b. **Humility** – humility requires us to recognise when we get things wrong, that we can grow and learn, that we are not the most significant players, and that we can collaborate.
 - c. **Power** – tackling injustice demands that we are wise about the use of power. We need to recognise where power lies and who is denied power. But we also need to recognise our own power, and know that we are sometimes called to give it away to others, to share it, or to claim it and use it well.
 - d. **Transformation** – justice is not only about responding to someone’s immediate needs, but also transforming the deep or structural injustices that cause those needs. Sticking plasters might be needed to stop the bleeding, but people experiencing injustice also need transformation.
- 18 Enabling local churches: There is a deep-seated commitment to justice amongst many Methodists, but local churches and their members are under a wide range of pressures. The report will aim to suggest key means by which local churches can respond to the call to be justice-seeking, but the project has been conscious of the need to do this in ways that are enabling and not another burden. Some will be new, others will not. Some could involve “sowing in already ploughed fields”, so for example using already established communication tools such as A Methodist Way of Life or offering resources through Local Preachers’ Meetings. Some may propose new ways of looking at existing justice work rather than starting something new. **How can the burden, perceived and real, on local churches be minimised? What examples are there of how local churches can be most helped to engage in justice work, as worshipping communities, in local areas or in solidarity with other communities?**

***RESOLUTION

82/1. The Council receives the report.

Appendix 1

For information, below is the working draft of a list of “Principles”, anchoring us in God’s justice and prompting our justice-seeking. These were shared with members of the 2022 Conference in workshops:

- **All humans are made in the image of God and worthy of equal value and dignity.** The search for justice will always entail treating others with respect and may involve restoring lost worth.
- **God desires the flourishing of creation and human community within it.** The search for justice does not diminish or limit the flourishing of others.
- **The God of the Bible has shown a bias to the poor and those who are excluded.** The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty and those who are marginalised in other ways as a priority.
- **God entrusts those in power with a special responsibility for upholding justice.** Those seeking justice will encourage and challenge those with power to fulfil their vocation.
- **God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice.** It is never just someone else’s responsibility. We all have a part to play.
- **God calls us to live in ways that reflect God’s character and the pattern of God’s Kingdom.** Thus seeking the common good involves honesty and truth, and may demand restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation.