

# Report from the Connexional Team

MC/22/35

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| Date of meeting          | 2-4 April 2022   |
| Contact name and details | Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary,<br><a href="mailto:swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk">swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk</a> |
| Action required          | To note  |
| Resolution               | 35/1. The Council receives the report.   |

## Summary of content

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| 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 January 2022. The report begins with news of the Team's response to the events in Ukraine, and the appointment of our new Director of Digital Engagement, before sharing how the Team has been supporting the work of the Methodist Council Objectives.
- 2 The Team has responded swiftly to the news of the invasion of Ukraine, by working alongside the European Methodist Council and All We Can to offer prayers and the ability to donate to support emergency needs. When the news of the invasion first broke, the Communications Team shared a prayer written by the Vice-President (VP) which was on our website at 0915. It has reached over 2 million people worldwide and 283,000 people have engaged with it. Working with colleagues in Global Relationships and our mission partners in Europe, our communications team was able to offer resources for services the following Sunday, a downloadable recording of the VP reading her prayer and links to a JPIT podcast explaining the background to the war. By the second day of the conflict we had communicated details of a joint appeal for Ukraine with All We Can and the following week released a [specially recorded podcast with Methodists in Ukraine](#). Prayers and resources are available on our website here: [Prayer for peace in Ukraine \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://Prayer for peace in Ukraine (methodist.org.uk)).
- 3 The new Director of Digital Engagement, Ben Hollebon, has joined the Communications team. He comes to us from the Church of England where he was their website manager for the past few years. He has spent his first week meeting people and will be looking at:
  - Platform verification across our main social channels for a more visible presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram
  - A review of social media monitoring tools and options going forward to service the whole Connexional team
  - Initial work into a user journey platform for identifying engagement across our online presence and handoff into local communities
  - Scoping of a new church finder/website platform

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

- 4 Our Safeguarding team has organised and hosted two safeguarding webinars this year highlighting information on and perspectives from a survivor of abuse experience in and around the Methodist Church. These have been planned and delivered with members of the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group and were extremely well attended with many more views online as both webinars are available on the Methodist Church website.



- 15 The Ministries team is also seeking to increase the number of people from the Global Majority (non-white backgrounds) in various pieces of work including the Supervision Reference Group and the Supervision training team.
- 16 As Worship: Leading and Preaching content is being reviewed, the team continue to work with the Justice Dignity & Solidarity (JDS) group to improve the diversity of the content. Work is well under way for the Easter CD – focused on ‘A place to belong’ including LGBTQ+, church at the margins and memory worship features. Training sessions have been provided for chaplains reflecting on the JDS strategy in their contexts.
- 17 Work on the Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) project continues to develop. The RMT practitioners are due to meet with the existing Place for Hope practitioners for an in person professional development event in March to further develop their skills and share together as a wider community of practice.
- 18 The Learning Network continues to work closely with the Inclusive Church Implementation Officer and the Equality and Diversity Adviser developing areas of the JDS strategy:
  - Unconscious Bias - Plans are underway to offer one session a month through the connexional year. Further work is underway to launch Unconscious Bias on Theology X which is due to be available from September.
  - Introductory foundation module – a number of Learning Network staff are working, in collaboration with Inclusive Church Implementation Officer and the Equalities and Diversity Adviser, to develop this module, on Theology X, with the intention to have the module available from September.

## God’s Church in God’s world/ Striving for Justice and Peace

- 19 The Mission team has been working in collaboration with others members of the Connexional Team to produce the Action for Hope report which is before the Council which provides further information about the project.
- 20 During February *Walking with Micah* was a priority on our social media channels during February and we shared specially-commissioned films and resources to help churches facilitate conversations with their members as well as a podcast explaining the project: [Walking with Micah \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://methodist.org.uk)
- 21 The World Mission Fund supports the provision of placements globally for the Global Mission Fellow (GMF) programme, enabling graduates under the age of thirty to serve in a faith-based peace, justice or community-based ministry project in another country for two years. In addition to that funding, the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) has affiliated status with the GMF programme, which is a United Methodist Church initiative. A Methodist from the USA has begun a placement at Wesley’s Chapel and Leysian Mission, and a British Methodist has joined the Surf Project of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
- 22 In 2022, we have five pilot *Agent of Change* roadshows events, working with regional partners across the country. These events will be aimed at children and young people, aged 8 to 16, and their workers. Each roadshow will explore a different aspect of being an Agent of Change and will support the aims and core principles of the *Agents of Change* programme.
- 23 The Children, Youth and Family team is currently working with the London District and with Wesley’s Chapel to host the first roadshow at the end of March – exploring what it means to be anti-racist. This event is running at the same time as an online event, ‘Striving for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity’, which forms part of the work of the JDS strategy and is exploring similar themes. Other events are planned with the Yorkshire Plus Region of the Learning Network, Leeds Sanctuary and several Youth Workers from Yorkshire Districts. We recently helped to facilitate a consultation with young adults and with a small group of children and young people on the Action for Hope report and the plans for the Methodist Church to move towards net zero carbon emissions. This year we will also be working with a small group of young adults to pilot two ‘Let’s Talk About Disability’ online events, which aim to offer a ‘solidarity circle’ for children and young people that can then feed into the wider JDS strategy.

- 24 Tickets for the JPIT Conference 2022 – ‘From the Ground Up: Unearthing Hope and Seeking Justice’ are now available. The daylong conference at Oasis Hub Waterloo, London, will be a hybrid event, allowing people to join online. The conference will ask ‘what does social justice look like where you are?’, and explore the power of communities organising for change around issues that matter to them, and connecting this up with the national and international picture. With speakers such as Emma Revie (CEO Trussell Trust), Zrinka Bralo (CEO Migrants Organise) and Al Barret (Co-author of ‘Being Interrupted’), Marsha de Cordova MP and Bishop Mike Royal (CTE General Secretary), and more to be announced.
- 25 JPIT coordinated an open letter to the Prime Minister, which was signed by 1000+ Faith leaders calling for urgent changes to the Nationality & Borders Bill. It was launched on 28th February, saying that the policies in the Nationalities and Borders Bill are dishonest and disgraceful, and must be abandoned. Representing the six major faiths, the letter brings together senior national leaders and community leaders from across the UK in the biggest faith exclusive action around the bill. The letter gained widespread mainstream press coverage and was quoted extensively in one of the House of Lord’s debates on the bill by the Bishop of Durham.
- 26 A response to the proposed legislation on Conversion Therapy was completed and submitted to the government. Our response, following memorial M20 to the Methodist Conference 2021, called for a complete ban on such practices.
- 27 The campaign about the persecution of the Uighur minority in China has continued by encouraging people to press some of the biggest clothing brands to show that their clothes or cotton produced in China is not made using forced labour.
- 28 JPIT continues to respond to the Cost of Living crisis. In the UK, conversations have taken place with communities across the country. Listening to the voices of those who will be affected more than others is a chance to hear the real cost of price rises and inflation on already strained communities, families and individuals.
- 29 Regular JPIT Blogs and the ‘10 Minutes On’ podcast covering issues including the one-year anniversary of the Myanmar coup, Universal Credit, Nuclear Weapons, the invasion of Ukraine and campaigning for changes to the Nationalities and Borders Bill have been produced as resources to assist deeper involvement in current issues.
- 30 The *Walking with Micah* project launched the invitation to take part in local Justice Conversations in February. These will run until June, with people invited to reflect on what a just world looks like and what key actions are needed to tackle injustice. Tools to support conversations are available on the *Walking with Micah* webpage, and people from around the Connexion have taken part in training webinars. The feedback collected from these Conversations will help shape a report to the Conference in 2023 on being a justice-seeking Church. The project lead continues to meet with a variety of groups within the Methodist family to seek their input. Working together with Methodist Heritage, *Walking with Micah* will launch a social media campaign at the end of May 2022, #MyJusticeJourney, encouraging Methodists and Methodist heritage sites to tell our stories of justice and injustice through personal objects. More details of the project along with Justice Conversation tools and ways of responding can be found at [www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah](http://www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah).
- 31 Continuing Local Preacher Development materials on justice and climate change have been developed and published on the Methodist Church website.

## Evangelism / God For All

- 32 We have commissioned several films which support the God for All strategy highlighting work that is going on in communities around the Connexion - [Church at the Margins - stories of church communities demonstrating love in action - YouTube](#). We have also supported the Youth President as he walked from Cardiff to London to highlight diversity in leadership. He has been recording short films each day that have been shared on our social media channels.
- 33 It has been eighteen months since *God for All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth* launched in September 2020. To mark this milestone the Evangelism & Growth Team has produced a short, public progress report of celebrations from the first seasons of the Church-wide

strategy and areas for development in the future. This 18-month update, which invites evaluative responses and questions from right across the Connexion, can be viewed and shared here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/24701/gfa-18-month-update.pdf>

34 The Evangelism & Growth team notes the following additions to the substantial, ongoing development work reported to the January 2022 Council meeting:

- Building on the foundations of *Methodist Way of Life*, a significant expansion of discipleship pathways work is equipping local Christian leaders to focus on discipleship culture in their churches and communities. A programme of webinars and a day conference this spring help churches reflect on personal/corporate discipleship and build intentional rhythms that encourage a culture that welcomes new people and deepens the faith of those who have been journeying with Jesus for a long time. The key dimensions of this expansion can be viewed and shared here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/24701/gfa-18-month-update.pdf>
- Bible Month 2022 resources to help the Church explore the book of Isaiah are now completely available online at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/bible-month>. These include the Bible Month booklet, full of theological insights for preachers, creative ideas for intergenerational worship, and discussion questions for small group leaders; preparation training sessions; engagement opportunities; and exploration webinars.
- *God for All* is pro-mixed ecology: supporting the flourishing of a diversity of evangelistic and missional approaches rather than pitting approaches against each other, and holding together commitments, which are sometimes falsely understood as opposing each other. A programme of “both/and” webinars this spring builds on this Gospel orientation, including “Evangelism in an Interfaith Context”; “Social Justice and Evangelism”; “Race, Ethnicity, Austerity, and Faith” as part of the *Life on the Breadline* Lenten course; and “Rural and Rooted”, which explores small rural churches engaging pioneering: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/check-out-evangelism-and-growth-webinars>
- The *Everyone an Evangelist* materials, designed to help groups from local churches and circuits explore the ways they are called to share faith and to grow in confidence as evangelists, are now available for order online: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/equipped-for-evangelism/everyone-an-evangelist>
- Methodist and ecumenical resources to help churches engage the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and Thy Kingdom Come as opportunities for community outreach, prayer, and faith sharing are now available online: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/the-queens-platinum-jubilee>
- Planning is well underway for an inclusive, evangelistic Methodist presence at six major public events and festivals in summer 2022; these campaigns will creatively engage real conversations on issues of faith and society, and will connect to related evangelistic outreach guidance for churches in their local communities.
- The inaugural Church Planting Intensive launched in February 2022. This hybrid residential and online year-long course is designed to lend support, training, and just-in-time input and reflection for New Places for New People and Church at the Margins projects in their first seasons of prayer, preparation, and launch.
- The connexional New Places for New People (NPNP) Guiding Team has prioritised the following two objectives (of the seven key objectives from its terms of reference) for the next two years of its strategic work: (1) to actively seek diverse and young emerging leaders in the Methodist Church who will shape, challenge and resource the NPNP movement; and (2) to advocate NPNP in the mission strategy of districts, circuits and local churches.
- The Church at the Margins Roadshow is happening this spring and summer across every region of the Methodist Church: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/cam-resources>
- Planning is underway for the second annual Methodist *Leading Your Church into Growth* Conference in early summer. This conference draws on the principles and practices found in many growing Methodist churches: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in->

[britain/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/explore-the-core-practices-of-growing-churches](https://www.britain/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/explore-the-core-practices-of-growing-churches)

- New Generation, a month of weekly online prayer sessions, launched in February to gather for multigenerational prayer about the about the issues children and young people face today, including the pandemic, mental health, violence, and identity.
- 35 The new Ministries Officer and Tutor in Evangelism and Leadership is offering input into courses at the Queens Foundation for the Bridging into Ministry course for student presbyters and deacons, first and second year probationers attending intensive weeks at Queens, and the MA module in Transformative Christian Leadership. The Superintendents' Induction has also been re-framed through the lens of leadership.
- 36 The Ministries team continues to work with the Evangelism and Growth team to find ways of equipping Local Preachers for mission and evangelism. We have renewed our work with the UMC/EMK on lay preacher training for English-speaking churches in Germany. A Chaplaincy and Evangelism event has been promoted entitled 'Everyone an evangelist, even chaplains?'

## Resources for the Church: the use of God's gifts (including Oversight and Leadership)

- 37 *The Youth Rep programme*, 14 roles were elected by 3Generate representing young people across the Connexion. The roles are as follows: Methodist Conference Rep (3), Methodist Council Rep (3), Ecumenical Reps (2), Global Church Reps (2), Agents of Change Reps (3) and Digital Rep (1). This year applications were notably more diverse in terms of ethnicity, disability, sexuality and gender. The first of two annual residential gatherings took place at the beginning of February.
- 38 The final steps in the reorganisation of the publishing operation were taken in April. The aim over the past two years has been to reduce our reliance on, and cost of, using mostly in-house production staff, and improve our responsiveness, adaptability and the flexible use of resources by the increased use of freelance editors and designers. New roles of Managing Designer and Assistant Designer are being recruited to oversee the implementation of our visual identity and liaise with our growing pool of freelance designers, illustrators and photographers. Tendering is underway for a Connexional Team Digital Asset Management System (photo-library software) to manage the vast amount of visual digital content that a 'digital first' approach to publishing requires. Our Managing Designer would welcome approaches from freelance designers wishing to share their portfolios.
- 39 We are also reviewing our forward planning and decision-making systems for publishing project approval and content scrutiny, to reflect the greatly increased digital output and reduced print production of the Communications and Publishing Services teams. A new Ethos Group has been convened in the Team to make an initial appraisal of the theological content of resources, but also to ensure they reflect the Church's strategic approach to inclusion and accessibility, global issues and social justice. This group may refer material to the Faith and Order Committee for further consideration, and established processes will be followed as usual for endorsement such as Conference authorisation.
- 40 The World Mission Fund (WMF) Grants Committee is beginning its work of considering applications from Partners for significant capacity-building grants available as we aim to reduce the World Mission Fund to reserve levels by August 2024. The monies available have been allocated regionally and each region's applications will be considered in turn.
- 41 The Global Relationships team is very grateful to have the Engagement team's Marketing Officer working to support the marketing of the World Mission Fund.
- 42 As well as the ongoing work of learning from MCB's Partners about their good practices regarding Safeguarding, the Global Relationships team is working with the Safeguarding team to respond to any requests from Partners for support in developing their policies. Thanks to collaborative work between the Safeguarding and Global Relationships teams, the Methodist Church in Peru seems set to be the first faith-based organisation in that country to have a Safeguarding policy. Conversations between the Global Relationships and Safeguarding teams to establish a protocol for reporting global concerns and a methodology to guide responses have begun.

- 43 The Ministries team continues to roll out supervision training as outlined in the Supervision Policy. This includes training for those people who were initially trained in Responsible Grace. New, more focused materials have been drafted and approved by the Ministries Committee to support Ministerial Development Review.
- 44 A reflection space is now being offered to all ministers in years 4-5, 10-12, and 28-30 providing a space to celebrate ministry, consider the next vocational steps, and give thanks to God.
- 45 Work on the competencies of Local Lay-Pastors continues as directed in the Changing Patterns of Ministry report. Resources have also been developed to help people discern a call to chaplaincy, which are available on the chaplaincy section of the website. The Ministries team have also worked with the Ministerial Covenant working group to craft their report to go to the Conference 2022.
- 46 The Learning Network continues to develop the shared work areas that can be offered across the Connexion as reported in the last Team report to the Council. Updates on these areas are as follows:
- Circuit steward training is planned for delivery during March. The training consists of 4 evening sessions and will be delivered on Zoom. There are over 70 circuit stewards signed up to attend. Further dates will be planned for later in the year.
  - Numbers attending Line Management training have been consistently good with between 12-20 in attendance.
  - Encounter has been running online since February 2022. There is a cohort of 19 people working through the programme in two groups. Planning is underway for next year's programme.
  - Supervisee Familiarisation has been offered between September and November. This offered through the two sessions with up to 15 participants.
  - Supervision CPD - the Learning Network are offering eight modules for Supervision CPD. All events are online: listed here, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/methodist-church-supervision-cpd-courses-39676866413> and on the relevant pages at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/supervision>. Over 150 spaces have already been booked across all courses.
  - Positive Working Together – Between January and June 2022 there will have been at least 2 training events for each of the 3 courses: Growing Through Change and Conflict, Responding to Bullying and Harassment, Scripture, Spirituality and Conflict.
  - The Learning Network is working together with the Complaints Worker and Place for Hope to deliver an interactive webinar for all Local Complaints Officers (LCOs) on 9 March. Over 70 LCOs have signed up to attend and the session will be recorded and made available for those unable to attend.
  - Mental Health First Aid training events are currently being offered by the trained trainers. A regular programme of events is currently being planned for the future.
  - Work on developing Theology X online platform continues with all those working on developing learning opportunities through Theology X meeting to review the work undertaken so far and plan further work required in offering learning and development opportunities through the online platform.
  - The Safeguarding team and the Learning Network are running a joint Safeguarding Conference on 10-11 March entitled 'The Inclusive Church and Safeguarding'. With a shared team having developed the programme for the event linking in our work on the strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity and New Places for New people - Pioneering ministries, Church at the Margins and Safeguarding. (See paragraph 5, above).

## Responding to the Gospel in partnership

- 47 The Safeguarding team working alongside the Global Relationships team have delivered two very successful safeguarding training sessions to a female ministerial training college in Karachi. This

followed direct requests from the grant making round with partners requesting support in developing their safeguarding practice.

- 48 While some marketing effort continues to be applied to new, core connexional resources, such as the marriage and baptism record books and *Methodist Prayer Handbook*, marketing work is to be concentrated on promoting the Connexional Funds, and initially, on generating income for the World Mission Fund. This renewed focus on promoting the funds has involved a review of our systems for online giving. As in publishing, we are in a time and circumstances that neither rely entirely on print anymore but nor are our people willing to do everything online. You will see incremental changes, therefore, in our supporter webpages and online donation options. Initially we will be offering standing orders to set up regular giving and continue to use a third party supplier such as *Just Giving* for one-off donations online, while we explore the most user-friendly, cost-effective, legally compliant and secure options for the Church.
- 49 Three new Mission Partners have taken up placements since 1 January, one of whom is from the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI), alongside whom we do much of our global relating, including sending all Mission Partners; the other two Mission Partners are sent jointly with the United Methodist Church, Germany. There remain three Mission Partners in training, and the training of Mission Partners has been brought back into Methodist institutions and is being conducted by Cliff College. Two more persons who were accepted for training are due to enter Cliff this May. However, despite MCB's global Partners still requesting Mission Partners, and persons still offering to be Mission Partners, recruitment remains suspended due to the financial concerns of supporting the numbers of Mission Partners that we currently have after the World Mission Fund reaches its reserve levels in 2024.
- 50 Andrew Ashdown has recently been appointed Partnership Coordinator for Africa for the Methodist Church in Britain.
- 51 The conversations with all MCB's global Partners continue hosted jointly with the MCI. It is intended that the Global Relationships Committee will receive a report that sets out the opportunities and suggests priorities for mutually supported global mission.
- 52 The World Mission Fund continues to be used to show MCB's solidarity with its global Partners in times of crisis and need.
- 53 The Global Relationships' Encounter Worldwide, Specialist Skills and Sabbatical programmes are beginning to open up after the pandemic, but very much guided by the needs of Partners; it is hoped that an Encounter Worldwide programme may be possible in the following connexional year. One British Methodist presbyter is currently on sabbatical and situated with the Theological College Lanka, Sri Lanka.
- 54 The Global Relationships team continue to offer support in the twinning of districts with a European and a non-European Partner. New training resources are available online for Methodists to support healthy twinning engagements.
- 55 The Ministries team is working with an experienced faculty of supervisors from a variety of other denominational contexts and experiences to ensure the church has the best representation of the work.
- 56 The Learning Network is partnering with Methodist Homes Association (MHA) once again to run a session entitled, 'The last taboo? Talking about dying', following the successful webinar in October entitled 'After the Storm – Coping with Covid-19, Grief and Loss'. The material for this is being piloted by MHA in April and the Learning Network and MHA will be offering a number of sessions across the Connexion in the next connexional year.

## In closing

- 57 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

#### **35/1. The Council receives the report.**