

Connexional Team Update

Contact Name and Details	Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary, swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	To note

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide the Council with an update of work undertaken in the Connexional Team since last reported to the Council in March 2020.
-------------------------	--

1. This paper provides the Council with an update of work undertaken in the Connexional Team since its last written report to the Council in March 2020.
2. This report is one of the ways the Connexional Team is accountable to the Council through the Strategy and Resources Committee. We want to ensure that this report is useful to the Council and we welcome suggestions from members of the Council about the use/content of this report and any other suggestions that the Council considers helpful in this regard.

The Conference Office

3. The Conference went as well as could be expected in the current climate. The team in the Conference Office worked hard to ensure the business was completed. Following the Conference, work took place to compile the *Minutes* and the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and start preparations for the next connexional year.
4. Work for the Conference included work with the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee on the status of ordinands being received into Full Connexion.
5. Work relating to COVID-19 is ongoing. The Senior Management Group and the Media Team are working hard to communicate information as well as possible in the fast changing situation. Guidance has recently been produced to aid District Chairs and Synod Secretaries in hosting online meetings over the coming months. Similar advice is being prepared for Circuits and Local Churches as well.
6. The Conference Office has recently said farewell to Karin Farnworth as she retired after this year's Conference. We welcome Sharon Hassanali who has been working in the Conference Office prior to moving into this role.
7. The Conference affirmed the 'Inclusive Church Strategy' and so work has been ongoing as the EDI Adviser has presented to the Senior Management Meeting and overseen the development of task groups to implement the different elements of the strategy.
8. The Ecumenical Officer has been working to ensure that the new Director of Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome could begin their work in September under new arrangements and with the necessary support in place.
9. The Assistant Ecumenical Officer has been continuing work with the Fellowship Groups specifically around:
 - i. Developing ways of working which ensure proper support and accountability.

- ii. Working with those who have been impacted by the changing policy around grants.
 - iii. Developing links with other faiths and working with the Districts to provide appropriate support for this work around the connexion.
10. Both the Ecumenical Officer and the Assistant Ecumenical Officer attend regular meetings with ecumenical partners to co-ordinate response to the challenges of COVID-19 and to support one another in the interpretation of advice from the government to churches.
 11. Despite the current restrictions, the work of DBS blemish checks and safeguarding risk assessments has continued. Extensive work has been undertaken to work on the Foundation and Advanced safeguarding training modules in order to be able to offer an online version of the required training. Work is in the final stages to produce updated domestic abuse guidelines and also a publication from our Survivors' Advisory Group along the lines of *Our Calling* and the Church's response to those who have been hurt. Joint work is also underway with the Global Relationships team to devise an agreed statement of safeguarding principles with partner churches and follow up recommendations from the recent audit of the grants process.

Ministries

12. Over the summer, the team have been working hard to prepare for the year ahead: Claire Potter has led in drafting a report on wellbeing in the ordained ministry which was considered by the Ministries Committee in September, and will shape our work in the coming months. There has been a dramatic drop in the number of people requesting a candidating pack which will mean that the number for training in 2021 is expected to be lower. We are just about to embark on a major review of our ministerial candidating processes, but any findings will not affect the process until 2023.
13. A great deal of work has taken place in the area of local preacher and worship leader training. September saw the launch of *Worship: Leading and Preaching* version 3.0. This upgrade will allow a much more embedded assessment process, removing the need for many of the forms students and tutors have found complicated. Version 3.0 will run in parallel with version 2.0 to allow people to complete their training.
14. Jonathan Dean, Director of Learning for Ministry, continues to work with our training institutions. A major piece of development work in the area of global theology continues with Cliff College and the developers of Theology X.
15. Developing the work of the Vocations Adviser, Alison Ransome, we intend to springboard into supporting work around promoting a Church for all people (The Inclusive Church). We are beginning a process of assessing where we have gaps in provision and will seek to plug these gaps.
16. We are delighted to welcome two members to the team working in Ministry Development. Gary Hopkins's work will focus on chaplaincy, lay ministry and lay employment (on a short term contract). Jane Bingham has transferred from the Learning Network to focus on Ministry Development and specifically developing Supervision alongside Jane Leach. We look forward to working with them as they bring their gifts and skills to the team.

Mission

Children, Youth & Family

17. With the decision to not go ahead with 3Generate 2020, the Conference agreed the launch of 3Generate 365 from September 2020, which is a year round process of engagement with children

and young people and their church leadership in their local setting. 3Generate 365 will be facilitated by the Children Youth and Family Team working alongside a network of people in Districts (District Ambassadors Teams and 3Generate Satellite Teams) to enable children and young people to listen to God, discern what God is saying, deepen their faith and be confident in being evangelists; sharing their faith with others.

18. 3Generate 365 volunteers, including District Ambassadors, will all be offered EDI training focusing on unconscious bias, inclusion, accessibility and equity based on the principles in the Inclusive Church report. There will also be webinars on mental health and wellbeing including ways of understanding and responding to trauma to prepare groups as they travel together post COVID-19.
19. Without 3Generate we are devising ways of using the 3Generate365 processes to hear from young people about the role of the Youth President and we will keep the Council updated on the progress of this review as it develops.
20. September saw the launch of the 'Leadership Year' co-hosted by Cliff College. This brings together the training offered to the One Programme Participants and Methodist Interns with the Rise and Shine event to form a more strategically focused year-long community of practice.
21. Green Agents of Change Catalyst Events for children and young people across Methodism interested in Climate Justice were launched in August with the first online events for 8-11 year olds and 12 to 17 year olds.

Engagement team

22. As emailing round service outlines and live streaming became the norm for worship for many during lockdown, a new section of the Methodist Church website was developed by the Publishing team to answer the 'frequently asked questions' that proliferated about copyright and the use of Methodist resources online.. As churches have started to reopen, the team have continued to support Communications with branded posters to encourage hand washing, face coverings and social distancing etc.
23. Work has continued on the conservation of the Methodist Modern Art Collection (MMAC) throughout the lockdown. It is hoped that the postponed Bewdley exhibition can go ahead at Easter 2021 and that the Collection will be shown as part of the Coventry City of Culture celebrations next summer

Evangelism & Growth

24. The connexional Evangelism and Growth Strategy was received and adopted by the Conference with a revised budget for 2020/2021. The Conference has directed the Council to bring a new budget proposal for 2021/2022 to the 2021 Conference. An accompanying video, *Good News to Share*, was launched after the Conference to help congregations celebrate evangelism in their own contexts.
25. Following the Conference, the Evangelism and Growth webpages were updated to help individuals, churches, circuits, and districts find guidance on taking reflective, strategic next steps. New opportunities, such as a transformational leadership learning community, and new resources, including a practical 8-step process for mission planning, are highlighted.
26. To celebrate the 2020/2021 Connexional Year of Prayer, a weekly (Tuesdays 12:45-1:00pm) "prayer meeting" was launched in September. This online experience draws on the diversity of Methodist traditions to help the whole Church pray together. Each week, different leaders will share Scripture, offer testimony, and creatively lead participants deeper into prayer.

27. *Methodist Way of Life* commitment cards and a “Brief Guide to a Methodist Way of Life” will be distributed to churches with membership tickets, with a more detailed booklet, “Finding the Way” planned for online distribution early this autumn.

Global Relationships

28. Church CAN work was initially put on hold during the pandemic. Some work has now moved to online with the first online workshops with MCSA on 5 August. These workshops initiate the strategic planning process for the church in Lesotho. An online introductory workshop is being explored for the church in Guatemala.
29. Five young people from Britain, Fiji, Italy and Zambia have been appointed to work together to build a campaign on climate justice for the global Methodist family. These ‘COP26’ workers are based in Britain, Italy, Zambia and Fiji.
30. The Global Mission Fellows based in Britain successfully completed their placements. The GMF programme has been suspended globally for 2020-21 because of the Pandemic. We are working with those projects as possible placement sites for 2021-22.
31. No short term People-to-People movements have been initiated during the pandemic, although we receive applications of interest.
32. Twinning applications are slowly growing, with a recent online meeting between the leaders of the Chester and Stoke district and Peru to initiate a link.
33. We have three Mission Partners under training beginning at Wesley House Cambridge, and six Mission Partner Candidates plus one Candidate for the new Accompanying Volunteer role.
34. We had a successful online Pre-Conference Consultation with Partners, which discussed issues of grant giving and the effects/response to COVID-19.
35. We increased the monies available for General Grants by almost four-fold to enable as broad a response to the impact of COVID-19 on our Partners as possible.

JPIT

36. During the summer of lockdown JPIT ran a series of surveys and focus groups to learn about the impact on poverty of COVID-19. We produced a [report](#) together with Church Action on Poverty, and also a [briefing](#) for churches on issues their communities might be facing as they emerge from lockdown.
37. Whilst COVID-19 has brought huge changes to all our lives, inequalities mean that some people have been hit even harder than others. We produced a short video – [Stay Alert to Justice](#) – reminding us of the need to stay alert to poverty, racial justice and climate change. We also ran or supported short campaigns on justice around [hunger](#), domestic violence, the global ceasefire and asylum.
38. JPIT offered a new daily prayer prompt via email or social media through [Stay and Pray](#), inviting people to pray for those around the world facing injustice.
39. Beyond lockdown, JPIT will be taking forward work on “[From Recovery to Flourishing](#)” about re-shaping the economy to enable the wellbeing of all people and the planet, beginning with an ecumenical vision.

40. A Methodist Intern, based jointly with JPIT and the Archbishop's Commission on Housing, has produced a series of short films, enabling people who have experienced homelessness to tell their stories and challenging churches to consider the question, [What will you do to end homelessness?](#) This resource helps churches to consider ways in which they might respond.
41. JPIT is currently developing a major campaign around household debt. We are working with other churches and organisations to propose a form of debt cancellation – or Jubilee – to allow families a more stable platform from which to face the uncertain economic future.

Learning & Development

42. The learning network have continued to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 situation with a wide range of areas of engagement switched to online delivery. Engagement with these online sessions has been positive, often with higher numbers attending than if the sessions had been face-face. Some of the areas of work that have been delivered through online facilitation are:
- Positive Working Together – Growing Through (Change and) Conflict, Scripture, Spirituality and Conflict and Bullying and Harassment
 - Line management training for those managing lay employees
 - Communities of practice including pastoral workers, W:L&P tutors and mentors, spirituality in the 3rd age, administrators, ministers, Methodist pioneer pathways, children and youthwork
 - Safeguarding training of trainers for foundation module (various pilots)
 - Weekly coffee morning – various support opportunities for various groups
 - Circuit Stewards training
 - Sustainable ministry workshop (pilot)
 - Online retreats
 - Supervision development days for supervisors
 - Mission beyond lockdown (together with E&G team)
 - Digital communications (together with E&G and Comms team)
 - W:L&P Tutor training
 - Various opportunities to reflect on ministry and mission in lockdown
 - Intergenerational ministry
 - Biblemonth training
 - Unconscious Bias training for Circuit Invitation Committee members
 - Various opportunities on how to get the best out of Zoom – as requested
 - Various requests to support planning to re-open buildings for mission
43. Through this online engagement we are learning and continue to learn what works well and what is most effective in online engagement. We recognised that church members' willingness to engage in online learning and development has undergone a step change – due to the forced change that COVID-19 has triggered with families and friends of all generations having to use digital means to stay in touch during lockdown.
44. Staff within the Learning and Development team continue to support the delivery and facilitation of Supervision training, working closely with the Ministries team. Plans for engaging in ongoing supervision training in an online format are well underway and some of the professional development for supervisors has already been delivered in an online format.

Property

45. The Property Support team continue to provide a wide scope of support to Managing Trustees and connexional colleagues, in four broad areas listed below:

Projects for Mission and Development

46. Even under current restrictions, the team are still providing support to individual groups of Managing Trustees and Ministers considering redevelopment of their churches as part of their mission plan. This includes a number of significant potential joint ventures to create new accommodation and sustainable income streams for churches through strategic redevelopment of land and property.

Guidance and Advice

47. Day to day workload is still dominated in supporting Managing Trustees in their property responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the expansion of a series of 'themed' guides. The team also provide additional support via phone and email queries and is nearing completion of adapting all guidance to reflect the differing policies for devolved administrations as well as England. It undertook a major review and rewriting of the guides in early August, as government guidance changed and lockdown restrictions relaxed, and a similar exercise was undertaken in mid-September. The Government's advice is reviewed daily by the team and benefits from links made by Rachel Lampard and JPIT with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government roundtable. All of the guides can be found at – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

Strategic Developments:

48. Regular strategic updates are brought to the Property Development Committee for discussion, looking to plan or facilitate for future wider connexional strategies, Managing Trustee needs or access to wider support opportunities. Currently the team are working on:
- District Property Secretary Mapping Exercise & Report planning for publication in the New Year.
 - Developing an approach to circuit property to ensure that the connexional resources required for the emerging Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission are more effectively aimed at Circuits and Districts to develop wider and more holistic strategies. This work has commenced, and the property team has started to have a number of conversations with Circuits who see the benefit of a wider review of their property portfolio.
 - Schools, Colleges and COVID-19 – this is a proactive initiative to create opportunities for Managing Trustees to engage with their local communities during the pandemic. A number of online discussions have been held with the Free Churches Group and Methodist Schools to explore principles for how Methodist property might provide over-spill accommodation to their local schools returning in September.

Partnerships

49. Like strategic partnerships above, the team continues to explore and establish potential partnerships which are crucial to future missional or development opportunities for Managing Trustees in using their property to its fullest capacity. All the discussions and links created so far are with established Methodist and Christian based organisations who have a shared ethos and commitment for missional impact in their communities.

Finance & Resources

50. The Finance Team has been particularly busy over the summer period as a revised budget had to be set in record time to reflect the impact of the pandemic on connexional funds. The Payroll team has also been busy processing claims for the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Claims in excess of £400k have been processed and this was all done without additional cost to the payroll bureau customers. The Gift Aid bureau has also had a successful summer following the introduction of the new portal for gift aid secretaries to submit their claims. Whilst there have been some teething problems for some users, overall we have processed more claims for more money more quickly than ever before.
51. The Facilities team worked hard to ensure that Methodist Church House (MCH) was ready to reopen from mid-September. This included working through the risk assessment and putting in place the measures necessary to allow us to declare MCH as 'covid-secure'. Whilst a small number of staff were able to return in September, HM Government's advice issued on 22 September led to the closure of MCH again at the end of that week and we do not now anticipate that MCH will be open to any but a small team of essential staff until 2021.
52. IT has continued to provide good support to the Team while we have been remote working. Whilst the Conference was supported by a technical team at Cliff College, the IT team were still involved in ensuring key aspects of the Conference were conducted as smoothly as possible, including developing the process for the electronic elections.

HR

53. The team has been busy with recruitment, particularly for the new One Programme Participants.
54. The visa process for incoming ministers has presented different challenges this year, working closely with the relevant colleagues in the Ministries Team, the process itself has progressed well despite challenges including travel restrictions and the closure of most local visa offices. This has resulted in a delay of many of the ministers physically arriving in the UK on time.
55. Wellbeing colleagues have hosted a wellbeing clinic for Connexional Team staff and plan to host another one very soon. Information and guidance relating to a range of health and wellbeing has continued to be shared and promoted on a regular basis.
56. A new Employee Assistance Programme has been made available to members of the Connexional Team, the service provides a range of resources and services that include an online GP service, mental health support, physiotherapy, medical second opinions, life, money and wellbeing support.

Communications

57. Engagement with the Methodist Church website and our social media channels has remained high since April, and consistently higher when compared with last year's figures. Our most popular pages have been connected with Coronavirus advice, A Word in Time Bible Study and Prayer of the Day. We have reviewed and updated our social media guidelines to make it explicitly clear that hateful or abusive comments will be removed and the author blocked from our pages.
58. We have supported our Property team colleagues by updating Coronavirus guidance on the website and through social media which has sometimes been challenging as Government advice has been shared very late in the day and/or changed with little notice. We have also, along with property, legal and ministries colleagues, spent time responding to queries and clarifications of the guidance.

59. We have had a strong media presence over the past few months including appearances on BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme by the President, the Revd Richard Teal talking about racial justice and JPIT's Paul Morrison talking about evictions. The Youth President designate, Phoebe Parkin appeared on 12 BBC local radio stations talking about A level results. We continue to have a good take up from Christian radio stations who use audio we send from our [weekly podcast](#).
60. We are currently working on a Christmas campaign which we hope to start filming in late September (COVID-19 permitting). It is an ambitious project which aims to bring together as many Methodist 'family' members as possible to speak of how 'God is with us'.

In closing

61. 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**

88/1. The Council notes the update from the Connexional Team.