

## Notice of Motion 2017/206: Growth Plan or End of Life Plan

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Discussion

## Notice of Motion 2017/206: Growth Plan or End of Life Plan

*In the light of the address given by the President of the Conference, the Conference with immediate effect encourages every Church Council annually to address and answer the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?'*

*The answer should be presented to the Circuit Meeting in order to aid their wider, strategic oversight of mission and ministry. The responses should also be annually reported to the District in order to fuel their discussions of Standing Order 962.*

*Should a local church offer no growth plan (within two years) they should be strongly encouraged and supported as they consider their end of life plan. The Conference directs the Council to undertake work on how this can best be implemented and report to the 2018 Conference.*

The Conference adopted the Motion.

1. Since the 2017 Conference much work has been done on the overall direction that God is leading the Methodist Church to focus on. From this work there has emerged a clear desire for a reaffirmation of *Our Calling* to be central to how we discern the future for all that we do. Within this significant time has been spent on considering the role and purposes of much of our structure, including that of the Circuit.

**Nature and Purpose of the Circuit:** *The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission and mutual encouragement and help. It is in the Circuit that presbyters, deacons and probationers are stationed and local preachers are trained and admitted and exercise their calling. The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit to churches of other denominations and to participation in the life of the communities served by the Circuit, including local schools and colleges, and in ecumenical work in the area including, where appropriate, the support of ecumenical Housing Associations. (SO 500(1))*

2. The life, witness, service and wellbeing of the Methodist Church is experienced primarily in the life of local churches. It is by being interconnected through the Circuit that we can best support one another, challenge ourselves and others, as well as determine the resources needed for our participation in God's mission. It is here that support and encouragement must be given if the Methodist Church is to have inspiration and hope and be reenergised for mission. Future activities should focus on the mission plans of these units (with the support of a reconfigured Connexional Team and the District) so that the whole Connexion can respond

enthusiastically to *Our Calling*. Each Circuit should be equipped and resourced to create and update their mission plans and be supported in the implementation of these plans. In reaffirming *Our Calling* throughout the Connexion there is an urgent need for the Circuits to be the primary place for the engagement with *Our Calling* as the strategic driver for the future of the Methodist Church. Circuits and Districts need to consider the use of resources (including both buildings and people) and what risks they will take to fulfil *Our Calling* in each particular context.

3. **Therefore the development of District and Circuit Mission Plans** in keeping with SO 400A(1), SO 500(1) and SO 962 is critical to how we face the future. This must be done with the recognition of the need both for careful, informed planning and creating the conditions which enable churches/circuits to have conversations about what is important and what God is calling them to. We need to set out on this journey noticing that we are participating in God's mission in our local context and our own lives.
4. It is for a Circuit to determine whether the balance between overall growth in each of the societies, and a ministry of pastoral care and presence. The Circuit Mission Plan could embody the following:
  - Reflect a journey with each of the churches in the Circuit as they look at *Our Calling* and assess their own health and vitality for the future
  - Continue to be added to and updated, shared with the District, regularly referred to and actively worked with to be achieved.
  - Encourage local churches to view their Circuit, positively and realistically.
  - Take notice of the needs of each individual society and also the District Mission Plan
  - Think appropriately about opportunities for church planting.
  - Examine which partnerships are enabling work to move forward and where they have become draining.
  - Think radically and honestly about the place and purpose of ministerial appointments in the Circuit.
  - Look at the use of skilled lay volunteers as well as considering pooling resources to employ lay employees in a variety of ways (including with reference to property, finance and administration).
  - Pay attention to the things that need to stop in the life of a Circuit (or at least be laid down for a time).
  - Understand the pressures, joys, sorrows and contexts of the communities we serve that we may not be reaching
  - Ask each church to identify, audit and build itself around a few priorities.
  - Examine what financial resources are being held in reserve and how these could be utilised for mission.
  - Ask where ministry is most needed as opposed to where it can be afforded.
  - Learn from other Circuits where mission activities are flourishing.
  - A focus on the joy of Christians gathering together to worship God.
5. Work is already underway in supporting Circuits in thinking in this way firstly through a working group, comprising Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) staff and members of the District Mission Enabler network, which has begun work on producing a small resource pack. This pack will explain the background of the Notice of Motion and provide tools to help local churches discern what they are being called to, drawing together good practice that is already happening locally as well as Appreciative Inquiry techniques. Another aspect of this work has been the hugely successful 'Reimagining Church' roadshows which have shared good practice from different places about mission priorities.
6. What is crucial is that Mission Plans, whether for Circuits or Districts, do not become one more activity that stops us from engaging in the mission itself. Serious consideration needs to be given to how we move from strategy to action in many places and that must be part of the ongoing work. Circuit Mission Plans are central to an ongoing culture change in the reimagining of our Church and a reaffirming of *Our Calling*.

7. As part of the response to this Notice of Motion the Council could ask that the Conference spend time, as part of its reflections on *Our Calling* which it agreed to in MC/18/2, also to consider the future of Circuit Mission Plans, District Mission Plans as found expressed in SO 962, as well as work already undertaken on the levies being applied to Circuit Model Trust Funds.

**Questions for discussion**

Are the suggested aspects of a circuit mission plan, as set out in paragraph 4, helpful considerations for circuits?

How might you add to or change the items in the suggested list?

Do you think that it would be helpful for the Conference to spend time considering the future of mission plans in the context of the focus on *Our Calling*?

How might circuits and districts be enabled and resourced to move from strategy to action (see paragraph 6)?