

Statistics for Mission – Collated responses from district discussion groups at the 2017 Conference

With regard to your own District...

- **Are the statistics for your District a surprise? Do they reflect your experience?**
 - Not a surprise to most – they do reflect our experience. However, one person was surprised, expecting that the membership would have fallen below 1000! We were encouraged by seeing some new members. The rate of decline reflects our age demographic (Synod Cymru).
 - Not a surprise overall. We've been aware of statistics for a while. The number of confirmations, whilst not as many as we'd like, are more than we might have expected. Given the rate of decline it's a surprise that the number of baptisms has held up (Wales Synod).
 - The stats were known, were not a surprise and reflect members' experience (Birmingham).
 - Not a surprise – have heard about losses in other meetings, eg Circuit Meetings. They reflect situation locally – people are not being 'replaced' (Bolton and Rochdale).
 - Not a surprise – small connection with young people, lower drop in membership than national average, general population declining and aging. Same in churches, less returning into area. High number of visitors to churches. 10% membership vs population – high in Fells and up to Carlisle. Loyal members matches attendance. District (Cumbria population ½ million). We have excellent ecumenical relationships. (Stats for Mission October misses the visitor season.) Southern Cumbria seeing less incoming (Cumbria).
 - Yes, as there was an increase in the last year. However, no in terms of the overall trend. Membership – this reflects the voluntary organisations who are also finding it hard to 'recruit' members, people appear to be reluctant to 'join.' Reflects how attendance is higher than membership (Channel Islands).
 - One year showed a peak – we need to look at more detail to see what did we do! Delighted to see attendance is rising – not membership (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent).
 - In part. Some churches have introduced contemporary worship – this has brought in additional people (Cornwall).
 - They are not a surprise and generally reflect our experience. Some surprise that we are in the position of greater rate of decline than other districts but we note a regional pattern in the north. There may be some reflection of more accurate recording of membership. Migration and our demographics play a part (Darlington).
 - Assessment pressures – re membership. We had an above average membership and attendance. Three spikes in attendance (then going back down). Lack of commitment to church (membership) and other roles (political parties) (East Anglia).
 - They are a surprise in that they paint a better picture than the perception on the island. We have the second lowest % decline in the Connexion. Our [...] is far flatter than the connexional average (Isle of Man).
 - Accurate for membership. There's a growth in AGAPE figures in some places (Leeds).

- We tend to examine the returns on a frequent basis, therefore the statistics are not a surprise (Lincolnshire).
- No – but we have been working on this for about a year. Yes [they reflect our experience] (Liverpool).
- No great surprises. It reflects our experience, but raised many questions. Among the questions is whether the growth in mid-week activities is accounted for here, on the sheet you gave us – which it isn't –but is in the report (Manchester and Stockport).
- They are not a surprise, however, we question whether they give a true picture. We have people attending who are not members, contact with a transient student population, plus other initiatives not currently counted. The district pattern echoes the circuit experience. Unfortunately, the number of members dying is more than the number of new members (Newcastle-upon-Tyne).
- Generally not though one member expressed pleasant surprise that our attendance is above average. Does attendance simply refer to Sunday attendance? (Lancashire).
- Most of the group attended/led relatively strong churches with good children/youth work so not their experience. However, most also were aware of the general pattern of decline across much of the district. Magnitude of decline was a surprise (Nottingham and Derby).
- Not a great deal of surprise expressed. The increase in additions in 2005 linked to district boundary shape. Glad that additions increasing. Mention of Jill and her good work as District Director of Mission (Northampton).
- No/Yes. But we would like to know which types/kinds of churches are growing. And, consider similar situations in other parts of the Connexion (Plymouth and Exeter).
- The statistics are not a surprise – sadly! They reflect the experience in many contexts but there are stories of growth in the district (Sheffield).
- The statistics are not a surprise. They reflect our experience on the whole... the surprise is that we appear to be 'holding steady.' Average church membership is not helpful without additional sociological information (Southampton).
- It was not a surprise to anyone, though there was interest in the number of transfers in and what made up the attendance numbers, given the number of members who are able to attend (West Yorkshire).
- These figures were not a surprise to any of us. These figures do reflect our experience (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- Not greatly surprised (York and Hull).
- Scotland – No, not a surprise – apart from a few unaccounted spikes in the bar charts! Sadly, they do reflect our experience. Although it was noted that this trend is reflected in other Scottish Churches, especially the C of S. The figures are, perhaps, starker because Scotland traditionally had a higher level of church attendance than in some other parts of Britain. Shetland – See above, but surprised at number of children/young people – maybe accounted for by weekday activities. Shetland presents a slightly better picture than Scotland because Methodism's presence on the Islands has always been relatively strong (Scotland and Shetland).

- No. We do not always show such things as Messy Church/Godly Play as worship. We do not see the quality of discipleship in such figures. Membership does not reflect the true discipleship of a church. Membership is not valued as it used to be. We need membership [...] to be exciting and challenging (BEH).
- **In light of these figures, what do you consider to be the strengths and challenges of your District?**
- Strengths: our Welsh language base creates loyalty and commitment. Smaller numbers mean a sense of community – people know each other in spite of geographical distances. Everybody counts. Challenges: language! A small language community for outreach to. Very hard to find people to take on jobs. Young people can feel very scattered and isolated (Synod Cymru).
 - We relate more closely to our situation in our respective circuits than in the district overall. Providing hospitality for those who do not wish to become members. Challenges: how do we work more effectively with Synod Cymru? Communicating and relating over a significant area. Becoming a church that invites membership (Wales Synod).
 - Strengths: compactness/good transport links. District officers quality support offer. Already looking at these questions. Proactive Mission Advisor. Proactive social justice involvement. Challenges: commitment is counter-cultural. Birmingham and the rest. Critical need for means to engage ‘young adults.’ Need for better communications and sharing (Birmingham).
 - Compact district = travel easier. Greater sense of collegiality amongst ministers. Challenge – less of a sense of community and more distractions because of urban context (Bolton and Rochdale).
 - District Chair – father figure! Challenges: depopulation of Cumbria, aging population (Cumbria and churches). Young people and families move out to university, few come back. 115 chapels. Smaller AV [?] congregations now. Rural people will travel 25-30 miles to large church. Decline in industry and employment – less able people to ‘run’ church and do mission. Small young people’s work (have nurseries). Strengths: family feel, connected district, friendly, good ecumenical work, high number 13+ baptisms, people loyal, Bible based, liberal, wide range theological, dementia-friendly churches (Cumbria).
 - Strength: attendance higher than membership. Weakness: reflects unwillingness to ‘commit’ to responsibilities. Challenge – for people to gain confidence in their church / faith and to feel confident bringing others to church. Need a strategy for evangelism or rather opportunities for evangelism (Channel Islands).
 - Entrepreneurial, willing to take risks, new ways of ministry through district teams. Turkeys won’t vote for Christmas! (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent)
 - Strengths: new style services and initiatives. Challenges: too many churches. Concern over buildings. Age profile – elderly (Cornwall).
 - High rate of baptisms due to enduring Methodist culture and need to continue work to engage in this area. This is also due to good experience of Methodist community. The challenge to maintain Christian/Methodist presence in rural areas. The need to look at allocation of resources across age profiles (Darlington).

- Small churches having a larger impact on their communities – we have a lot of those. A lot of faithful in some of our churches (East Anglia).
- Strengths: high % in terms of local population. Relationship/partnership with SHMT and involvement in schools etc. New housing developments. Weaknesses: age profile. Parochial view of local churches. Hands tied in terms of trusteeship in developing strategy (Isle of Man).
- Ex-mining communities, where Methodist chapel is ‘the church’ (especially for rites of passage). Challenge: we are not good at telling the story of Jesus and making disciples from that work. We struggle to make the significance of membership as clear to people that they might move from personal faith into commitment to the Methodist Church (Leeds).
- We are the most sparsely populated county in England and our attendance [as] percentage of population is pretty good. We feel it’s more difficult to increase numbers in small rural chapels – newcomers stand out and a larger percentage of members in small chapels are activists rather than large membership churches (Lincolnshire).
- We do make new members and people are coming to faith. The age profile is the biggest challenge (Liverpool).
- Strengths: we are in touch with a lot of people. Many people, doing many good things. Challenges: where the focus of our pastoral ministry should be – particularly regarding baptism and addressing those leaving membership. A need for quality work in local churches. How have the lives of our members been transformed by their discipleship? (Manchester and Stockport)
- Challenges include the number of small churches, many in rural areas, that are closing. Staff are overstretched and perhaps don’t model a good ‘rhythm of life.’ We need a change of culture/mindset. People need to think differently about their own church, to see the bigger picture and try to discern what our priorities should be. However, as a district we do take ‘holy risks.’ There are signs of growth in some areas and we are seeking to encourage a more missional approach (Newcastle-upon-Tyne).
- Rural chapels widely spread are not easy to resource. One challenge will come from massive development in certain hitherto rural areas – villages and small towns with large new developments. Clusters of churches v. close together, which want to remain separate. Schools (not shown) are a great strength – provide an arena for contact. Another strength – good coverage in general across the district. Churches in most communities (Lancashire).
- Churches with youth/children’s workers are doing well – lesson for others. Numbers of young children quite good – but they probably don’t reflect such as Messy Church, Brigades etc. Teenagers relatively few – must work harder here. Potential for work with older people – mustn’t forget them (Nottingham and Derby).
- A lot of baptisms but they don’t end up as members – failure to ‘retain’ – question is – is it a lack of pastoral care of families? Are we missing opportunities? It is a challenge. We don’t ‘connect’ with young people. We don’t celebrate our strengths – our reserves per capita are going up – we could cash that in. Relationship between population density and chapel volunteers isn’t shown (Northampton).
- Challenges – there hasn’t been the employment, particularly for younger people – significant numbers go away for education and never return. So many places have populations that are

growing older. And, many of our people are very tired. Opportunities – the fastest growing economy is in Exeter. We need to follow the population flow. And, significant building is going on with the potential for new towns and yet more development in some villages (Plymouth and Exeter).

- Strengths: pastoral/discipling opportunities presented by rites of passage which continue to be high in number. Churches quite well/strategically placed around the district. Lots of activity in relation to social action. Challenges: not making enough new Christians. Ill-equipped to nurture people in discipleship. Too much emphasis on traditional Sunday worship (Sheffield).
- Strengths: massive opportunities in rural and urban. Finances are sound: use for outreach. Transfers in positive. Challenges: thinly spread – under-ministered. To recruit and train more lay ministers/staff. Need to take risks (Southampton).
- Challenge: to make disciples. To nurture disciples. To strengthen and extend centres of excellence. Strengths: still good community relations to build on (West Yorkshire).
- Challenges: high density of buildings in urban areas. Not knowing where our youth are. People (lay/ordained) being spread thinly in rural areas. Resistance to change. Rootedness in the geography. We do not reflect our communities in urban areas. Strengths: pockets of enthusiasm. Prayerful care. Pastoral and practical care in communities. Number of transfers in is greater than those out (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- Multicultural people coming to faith – asylum seekers on Alpha Course (30 males). Traditionally in a more Methodist area. Transfers in are more than transfers out. Good spread of churches. We have an aging population. Two university cities – lighter population – requires addressing. Many good news stories. What do we do about encouraging male population into church? (York and Hull)
- Scotland – Challenge: we have the biggest percentage decline of any district. Circuits and churches need to be honest about the figures. Are even these figures a true reflection of the membership? The losses for other reasons (what used to be called ‘ceased to meet’) offer a challenge and an opportunity. Why did they leave? How could we re-establish contact with them? Looking for a silver lining, we felt that the stark nature of the statistics is a wake-up call and, therefore, could be a motivator for some positive action. If we’ve been waiting for a rainy day, it’s arrived. Where should we invest money and other resources? Should resources of ministry and money be put into key congregations with the focus on growth? Where would that leave the smaller ones? Should they be put on a ‘care and maintenance’ basis? The scattered nature of our congregations in Scotland – and even Shetland where the circuit/district is 100 miles long – means that amalgamating churches is not easy. The hard fact is that church mergers lead to losses of membership (eg the experience in Edinburgh, a relatively compact area). Challenge: the competing demands of ‘machine’ (the machinery of the church) and mission. Shetland – See above but Shetland has the strength of a lower average age profile (Scotland and Shetland).
- Inclusive district – work well with probationers. Grants for all who attend 3Gen (we then need to follow up on support of this). Circuit membership training to help with this. Our membership seems to have bucked the national trend. The shape of the district seems to make communication and [sharing groups?] difficult (BEH).

- **What might God be saying to the District, through this information?**
 - We have a great and unique opportunity to minister to the Welsh language community, including learners. We need to get together more – ‘big’ gatherings to encourage each other (Synod Cymru).
 - How do we share good practice across the Synod? Use statistics as a launchpad to do something differently. What sort of family is it that people leave and nobody follows it up? (Wales Synod)
 - Know circuit/area – build specialisation within different congregations. Have intentional intergenerational work. Be intentional about consistency of worship leading (Birmingham).
 - Reconsider how we engage with local community (Bolton and Rochdale).
 - Evangelist. Reach Team – Moving Mountains 8-11 March outreach – mission communities. Focus on mission – challenge to churches. New forms of church picking up. Those clinging on to normal church. Church attendance high 8%. Need agents for change – use audits – leadership willing to lead and challenge. Sharing in success – mentoring – peer groups new ministers. Kendal new way of being circuit. Connect to community use of church. Look to getting minister in local appointment (Cumbria).
 - Need a strategy to create a different expression of church. Intentional faith formation. Opportunities for worship on other days of the week. Nurturing and deepening existing disciples to enable them to grow new disciples (Channel Islands).
 - How do we foster above in circuits and local churches (ie entrepreneurial, risk-taking). What do we stop doing to free up capacity for new plants/plans. Look at mission teams? Small – from local churches (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent).
 - Go out to the mission field. Meeting people where they are. Wake up and do the work (Cornwall).
 - Make more disciples? Follow through the baptisms. Look to appoint District Evangelism Enabler. Encourage sharing of experience – connexionalism! (Darlington)
 - We need to reflect carefully upon work with children and young people. We should not underestimate the value... of our smaller churches (East Anglia).
 - It’s not all doom and gloom so go for it (Isle of Man).
 - We have disciples who are not members but we hide the fact that we have members who are not disciples – does the membership model work for the next generation? We’re landlords to people seeking some spirituality (we provide rooms for groups, do we connect with them to respond to the seekers? (Leeds).
 - We’re concentrated too much on attendance of worship. We are actually holding up better than the district average, our attendance is reducing more slowly than connexional attendance. Local church pastors is the way forward – continuity and focus on smaller number of churches per minister (Lincolnshire).
 - Some churches in the wrong place. What are churches’ plans for mission expenditure? (Liverpool)
 - Engage with faith beyond the church. Equip people for witness (Manchester and Stockport).

- We need to strengthen the prayer life of the district – to hunger for change. Continue to discern where God is at work, to re-assess our priorities and to be prepared to lay things down if necessary. To manage closure of smaller churches to avoid a ‘lingering death’ which draws in resources but achieves little. To try to understand what the growth figures mean. If accurate, what are these churches doing? (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
- Change the trusteeship. Also need to find a way of enabling local churches/circuits to be able to fund work where there are missional opportunities. Need to release money from circuit accounts for mission. Need serious review of reserves policy (Lancashire).
- Wake-up call for making new disciples. Focus on large numbers of ‘AGAPE’ – our no. 1 mission field (Nottingham and Derby).
- We need to make more disciples – we can’t wait for people to come into our buildings – planting new churches in places of new build estates etc. District Schools Officer – a possibility for building Methodist Schools (a challenge with different diocese boundaries). We need to pay attention to how we speak of our Church – how we speak of God (Northampton).
- It doesn’t have to be like this! What do we do about the people who are interested in Jesus but not interested in the Church? We need to shift our thinking from ‘community’ to ‘relationship’. Why would I belong? Don’t focus too much on the numbers – focus on good relationships and on needs. However, if we do this, we will also need to be good at taking the next step and proclaim Christ. (We are not usually very good at this!) (Plymouth and Exeter)
- Abandon some church buildings. Invest more in young people/young adults and empower them – work more closely with universities. Use *Time to Talk of God* to build confidence in faith sharing. More sharing of resources of every kind needed (Sheffield).
- What are the churches that are growing doing, that we are not? Employ evangelists – not ‘enablers.’ Consolidate – creating critical mass, ie three into one to share resource of people. Reduce ‘maintenance’/duplication – free up people and money for MISSION (Southampton).
- We need to build on young disciples and leaders. We need to talk of God. We need to build on what is growing (West Yorkshire).
- Look at why some political parties (the Labour Party) have increased their membership so significantly in a short period of time. Could we learn lessons? We don’t understand where the youth of our district are – find out! Perhaps we could see whether Newcastle figures are similar to ours, ie is a focus on youth, eg Youth Synod, bearing fruit? Tension between prayer and evangelism – which comes first, or how can they come together? Don’t be afraid of failure – be bold (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- Showing good news stories/not dead yet. Lots going on but need to be confident. Don’t be complacent. Be bold. Take risks (York and Hull).
- ‘Get off your backside and do something!’ Not just getting on a soapbox and shouting the Good News but also journeying with people – laughing and crying with them. ‘This is going to be tough but take my hand and we can travel together.’ Some of the stuff that our churches do is great – foodbanks, anti-fracking, etc – but how far is this ‘displacement activity’? Do we find it easier to do these things than to engage people with what it might mean to be a disciple of Jesus? (We are not suggesting that we don’t do these things, but if

that is all we do we are failing in the imperative to 'make disciples'. It's not always size that matters, but the dedication of the members (Scotland and Shetland).

- We need to make people feel valued. Invest in them so they can be released for other work. To be creative and find ways to help every age. Need to instil a sense of vocation. Play to your strengths of both the minister and the congregation. Seek where we need to develop and plant new churches (BEH).
- **In light of these statistics, what do you think might be the way forward for your District?**
- Closer working with the Wales Synod – eg to collaborate on running outreach activities for Welsh learners. Plenty of other mission opportunities – lots of potential!! (Synod Cymru)
 - Encourage churches to plan a membership service ahead of identifying candidates. Be intentional! (Wales Synod)
 - Continue with our District Mission Plan – church without plans already developed and developing. Find ways of using social media more effectively (pay someone a couple of days a month?) (Birmingham).
 - Go outside the buildings. Need to welcome people better and give people the opportunity to learn about faith (Bolton and Rochdale).
 - Intentional mentoring – new ministers – peer groups. Leadership work – teams to reach out. Leadership willingness to lead change. Intentional resourcing – view of churches and sharing in success. DMLN – resource events far away for focused 'local' leading (Cumbria).
 - Intentional evangelism. Possibly employ, train and develop Evangelism Enablers or evangelists to 'kick start' in certain areas/age groups (Channel Islands).
 - Circuit leadership need to be able to make decisions when church has reached end of life. Trusteeship may need to be in district. Need to be involved in new estates – get developers to build house as base – our churches not always in right place. Using resources in different places – one place resourcing another (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent).
 - We are having a special Synod on 9th September when we will use these statistics. We have big issues to address in Cornwall but we are putting things in place (Cornwall).
 - Evangelism Enabler. Connexionalism principles. Encourage generosity of spirit. Identify areas for planting new churches. We need to encourage committed, active members (Darlington).
 - Trying to persuade churches to have a go at something new. Do we need one minister – one church, to help them grow? Continuity in churches that want to grow. To give more attention to intentional discipleship-making. To encourage a culture of holy risk-taking (East Anglia).
 - Evangelism Enabler. Sharing of finance (Isle of Man).
 - Building relationship with neighbouring church – prayer walk, joint bible study. DAF grants enhanced for places where there is sign of growth. Make connections with the groups that 'just rent a room' – chaplaincy. Chaplaincy to uniformed organisations (Leeds).
 - NB More people were attending than were members in 2002. Today more members than attending – is this due to more housebound? (Lincolnshire)

- Continue the strategic review. Mission & Ministry Teams into circuits to help focus on mission and evangelism. Find out what is working where (Liverpool).
- We have a District Development Plan, written in the light of continuing reflection on Stats for Mission. Three main areas: 1) Prepare to be a diverse and growing church; 2) Prepare to be a smaller church, primed for mission; 3) Celebrate and resource what we are doing and being today (Manchester and Stockport).
- Church must be church for God to use us. We need to take more risks in mission. We shouldn't stay put to gather strength for mission – by engaging in mission we become stronger. We need to be open to different models, including class groups and larger gatherings – but remembering the importance of local relationships. Perhaps realise we can't be everywhere. Where should we prioritise? (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
- Release ministers and Superintendents from too much admin in order to enable them to engage more in outreach (Lancashire).
- Use district resources (Mission and Pioneer Enablers [...]) to help churches. Identify pastors, especially in smaller struggling churches – but pastors who have a heart for mission and evangelism. Identify 'can do' and 'can't do' churches (Nottingham and Derby).
- Enabling people to gain confidence in their faith – a call for personnel – numbers of workers for the harvest (114 members / minister). Local leadership for mission. Admin. Youth workers. Prayer – growth. Hearing loops. Consider when we offer worship – we could change the times of service (Northampton).
- Learn from the areas of growth. Where is God at work; where is the Kingdom being revealed and can we get on board? We need to 'catch the wave' in the local setting. Do we have the courage and conviction to do so? Let's do something similar to this exercise at Synod. We need God to do something! We cannot do it in our own strength (Plymouth and Exeter).
- Ask every church to stop doing something in order to focus on making disciples. Get outside our buildings. Take more risks. Educate others on the benefits of connexionalism. Undertake skills audit of members (Sheffield).
- As a district we need to be firm, focused and prioritise our assets and resources so that our ministers can minister not administer (Southampton).
- Conversation and action in relation to the above. Reflect on the idea of once per month (high quality) worship for all the circuit (West Yorkshire).
- Resources concentrated in mission rather than fellowship churches. Close all the churches on one Sunday and the congregation go out and be church into the community. Learn from experience of World Church partner. Don't assume busy churches today will be successes of the future. Foodbanks, Sunday Schools, hospital chaplaincy, prison visits offer alternative Christian communities (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- Collaborative working. Engagement outside of Sunday worship. District Development Plan. Visible Christian presence. Identify where we need to be. Training strategic plan for making disciples (York and Hull).
- Scotland: Intentionality and focused mission. Focused use of resources - ministerial and lay & DMLN, etc - to grow the work. Prioritising & focusing and recognising that we cannot do everything, especially with our very limited resources of personnel and finance. Invite

congregations and Circuits to set themselves realistic goals for growth. We need to teach/explore with our people about what they believe in contexts other than the Sunday sermon. It is not always the size of the group that matters but the dedication of the group members. We do have congregations in Scotland that are growing. What can they teach the rest of the District? The evidence seems to be a combination of good and effective leadership from the presbyter/deacon, focus and a committed core within the church. The appointment of a presbyter to work with 'churchless Christians' and 'missing Methodists' (10,979 according to the 2011 Census) is one way in which we are seeking a way forward for Scotland. Shetland – See above. In Shetland, especially Lerwick, there are lots of Churches. We don't need to compete. What should be the particular Methodist focus/priority? Work together or find a niche that they are not covering (Scotland and Shetland).

- Encourage circuits to look at their mission. To pray and offer support. To fast and pray. Make Synods exciting and encourage people to take the info back to circuits. Grants: focus on people not buildings. [...] Quality of worship needs addressing (BEH).
- **How might you use these statistics in your District? Is there other information it would be helpful to collect in the future?**
- To look at where we could develop Welsh language work where there is none. To move into areas where the Welsh language is growing – perhaps by looking at the stats with Wales Synod at Y Cyngor (Synod Cymru).
 - Why people 'cease to meet' (Wales Synod).
 - Ways [...] energy confidence and enthusiasm. Help people be released from things they don't enjoy. Information – age and gender balance. Webmap to have circuit boundaries. Participation in national church census? (Birmingham)
 - Use the statistics as a positive challenge – alerting without alarming. Would be useful to have other demographic statistics in order to assess opportunities (Bolton and Rochdale).
 - Ecumenical matching cross-working partners – stats? What data to collect? Minister in every church – SSM mi LA. [...] Focus on growing churches – free up ministers (one of). Model circuit missional and pastoral care. Enabling ministers to engage in evangelism and mission. Missional statements for each circuit. Resource sharing – financial (Cumbria).
 - To continue the conversation. We need circuit statistics and church statistics (Channel Islands).
 - We note – no mission teams going out, eg lay witness, Cliff College, Rob Frost – where is evangelism lead coming from connexionally? 'Where do I look for ideas of how to grow?' Can we do 'visits' to other districts to see what works elsewhere (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent).
 - As above (Cornwall).
 - Use within DVST and DPC for future planning. At connexional level we need to look at the definition of membership (Darlington).
 - To challenge and inform. But also to celebrate persistent faithfulness of communities (East Anglia).

- These statistics are an encouragement to be positive and make bold decisions (Isle of Man).
- *No response (Leeds).*
- NB We don't feel that raw numbers are helpful. What we would have preferred would be attendance ratio of population for both district/county, Connexion/county. Interrogate to a greater depth (as we are seeking to do). NB We live in a county that clearly has a net migration for young people. Most incoming migrants tend to be Roman Catholic or Orthodox. Our mission is to the elderly in the main (Lincolnshire).
- [...] annual returns re church finances and expenditure on property (Liverpool).
- How could we bring in some qualitative data – eg how we are using strategic development plan, what and how we are doing (Manchester and Stockport).
- Perhaps the statistics could show the age profile. The stats could be a starting point but it was felt that more detailed district figures might be more meaningful. These could be used at Synod to begin the difficult task of self-examination of the circuits and churches. NB the question of trusteeship does need to be looked at (Newcastle-upon-Tyne).
- Issuing the challenge to discover why people are leaving? Need to encourage people to engage seriously with the Gift of Connexionalism and to understand what it means to be part of the Methodist Connexion (Lancashire).
- In the words of the Youth President: "sit in a corner and cry." Spur for making disciples – top of agenda for everyone. Not sure about consistency of stats – who's included in AGAPE numbers? (Nottingham and Derby)
- A flaw in that we don't have context. Market Harborough for instance – growth of older people because of population increase so we want to see changes of population next to the figures (Northampton).
- *No response (Plymouth and Exeter).*
- Within Superintendents' meeting. Challenge Church Councils to consider membership statistics. Look at some anonymised examples of growth/decline and consider what might be different about them compared to our own context. Tell the stories of growth in Synods/Circuit Meetings. Undertake connexional research into growing churches. Stay with one initiative for longer than we do to give time for embedding (Sheffield).
- Attendance rather than membership figures are helpful as this is more of a true reflection on our churches' work and efforts to grow the Kingdom. We need to make better relationships with our AGAPE in order to encourage people to make the next step towards being 'children of God' (Southampton).
- Still reflecting on this (West Yorkshire).
- To convey a sense of urgency back to the district and understand how to do this. Beyond the figures, overlay that all is not doom and gloom. Young people/children are influenced by friends who are having fun. Make Sundays fun! (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury)
- Appreciative enquiry as a district. More demographic data in summary form. Highlighting statistics. How much evangelism goes into funerals? (York and Hull)

- Perhaps the Synods, circuits and churches could take an honest look at the figures. We would like to use the printouts that have been used in this exercise as a basis of conversation. It would be good for the Scotland/Shetland reps to Conference to share their experience with the districts. It might be good to add that although the Scotland figures, especially, were pretty dire, we didn't have a sense of total despair. We were pretty sure that there are ways forward for us given a commitment and focus. It should also be said that these statistics need to be seen against the history of Methodism in Scotland (not Shetland). There has never been a golden age of Scottish Methodism and despite our small numbers we have a larger membership than at the time of Wesley's death and following his twenty-two visits to the country (Scotland and Shetland).
- Show these in an exciting way. How many young people are we really reaching? Refine accuracy. Add LP and WL. Social media – good website – to encourage and advertise our churches (BEH).

With regard to the other District you have been asked to consider...

- **Are the statistics for this District a surprise? Do they reflect your experience?**
 - Yes – a surprise! We thought of N E England as a stronghold of Methodism and were surprised to see any decline at all (Synod Cymru, considering Nottingham and Derby).
 - Can't comment other than to say that it's noticeable that in contrast to the figures we've just looked at, B&R is a more compact area with churches more evenly spread. Their figures are below the average membership (Wales Synod, considering Bolton and Rochdale).
 - *No response (Birmingham, considering Scotland and Shetland).*
 - No. They reflect the geography and they follow a similar pattern (Bolton and Rochdale, considering the Wales Synod).
 - No. Positive go ahead place – growing population [...]. Decline more ratio – matches national. Baptism/member low – additional drop from 2008. Deaths same % as Cumbria per head population. Evangelism low and church membership low. More adherents – convert to members? Surprised in district with influx of 'new people.' Hard to answer question re experience (Cumbria, considering Southampton).
 - The 'blip' in 2008 was caused by...? What happened to cause growth in the following two years? Why is it so volatile? Attendance is erratic? Changing patterns of family life? Moving for employment? Transfer growth greater than confirmations. Is it a retirement area? (Channel Islands, considering Lancashire).
 - Similar to us – geographical challenges greater (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent, considering Plymouth and Exeter).
 - We didn't have much time for Leeds – sorry (Cornwall, considering Leeds).
 - As we don't know the area it is difficult to say (Darlington, considering the South East).
 - Again, membership and attendance above [average] due [to] two spikes 2003; 2009, same as ours (East Anglia, considering Manchester and Stockport).
 - How rural the district is. Baptisms have increased whilst membership and attendance have increased [I wonder if one of these should read 'decreased'] (Isle of Man, considering Sheffield).
 - *No response (Leeds, considering Cornwall).*
 - Membership has declined less than attendance. Surprise that the decline reflects the same decline as the rest of the Connexion; we had got the impression that African migration had boosted numbers so much that the churches were holding their own (Lincolnshire, considering London).
 - Seem to be similar (Liverpool, considering Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
 - We not the [rural?] district but a very similar pattern of decline – no surprise. We don't know enough to reflect on experience. Some interesting places where our district and EA have 'blips' in the same year (Manchester and Stockport, considering East Anglia).
 - The statistics were not a surprise. The trends are similar, however, the figures are much lower (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, considering Synod Cymru).

- Fairly flat – no evidence of severe decline but on closer inspection is this to do with the scale of the graph. On a par with us – we’ve lost 33%, they have lost 25% (Lancashire, considering the Channel Islands).
 - None of us knew much about the district. Large decline in attendance notable (Nottingham and Derby, considering BEH).
 - The attendance and membership are very similar – not like our district. They must be better at making members. Is it a cultural difference? Transfers in are greater than confirmations – this surprises us. Is it population migration? (Northampton, considering West Yorkshire)
 - No. Surprisingly similar to our own. They lost 4,500 members in the period. A greater loss than our district. What happened in 2003 when 331 people left? (Plymouth and Exeter, considering Chester and Stoke-on-Trent)
 - Not sure. Have no experience of the Isle of Man but commend their ability to sustain membership (Sheffield, considering the Isle of Man).
 - Yes – slower decline than average but attendance lower than membership. Baptisms high? Translating into high confirmations – God at work (Southampton, considering Cumbria).
 - Similar trajectory to our own. We are aware there is much house building in Northampton – we wondered how this would be tackled. What effect does London commuting have on this district? (West Yorkshire, considering Northampton)
 - We note some differences in numbers of churches but the decline is steeper than ours. Why might this be? In other words, has ‘pruning’ church buildings led to greater short-term decline? What happened in 2010/2011? A big boost on the graph but has fallen off since then. Apart from city centre and the Wirral, we have more smaller circuits than Liverpool. Are people ceasing to meet or is there a retention concern? (because the other losses are proportionally larger than ours) (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, considering Liverpool).
 - Bristol decline is greater in Bristol. Figures similar – York and Hull have more baptisms. Not as many members per population. Square mileage of each district very different (York and Hull, considering Bristol).
 - In some ways, not a surprise. Roughly similar to ours in the shape of the graphs. Birmingham has fewer attendees – just – than members. In both Scottish districts that position is reversed (Scotland and Shetland, considering Birmingham).
 - More urban area. Many more baptisms. Much smaller population but show % of figures against population. Both district and circuit. Smaller land mass. Better transport facilities. Rural on outside edges. Large populations [...] transport links (BEH, considering Nottingham and Derby).
- **In light of these figures, what do you consider to be the strengths and challenges of the District?**
- Strengths: retention of members. Challenges: apart from the city, chapels are very sparse and scattered (Synod Cymru, considering Nottingham and Derby).
 - Hard to read strengths and challenges without greater knowledge of the Bolton & Rochdale District. Area where Methodist Schools are operational – is this evidenced in the number of

baptisms? What does the presence of other faiths help or hinder Christian mission? (Wales Synod, considering Bolton and Rochdale)

- *No response (Birmingham, considering Scotland and Shetland).*
- Distances are a major challenge. Ministers must feel isolated (Bolton and Rochdale, considering the Wales Synod).
- Positive: the district covers rural, cities, fringe west of London – multitude of contexts. Diverse communities. Have reasonable spread of churches and have halved number of circuits recently – mission focused or area or ministry? Good transport links, smaller than Cumbria with 6x population! Problem people work till late? Positive: very rich area's IOW, Poole Bay, Southampton (poor?). Sharing financial resources? Lots of supernumeraries? Hampshire. Negative: struggle to station? Positive: younger retirement area (Cumbria, considering Southampton).
- Significant numbers of transfers in – what does it signify? Is there a process within Methodist membership making statistics more accurate? Is a strength people transferring in? Where are the growth churches? Need a more detailed map. The stats raise more questions than they answer (Channel Islands, considering Lancashire).
- Seem a lot of churches in rural and dispersed/sparse area (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent, considering Plymouth and Exeter).
- *No response (Cornwall, considering Leeds).*
- Challenge of converting high attendance to membership. Greater average membership of churches may mean greater availability of office-holders. A more transient population could be a challenge or a strength. Is there a challenge to follow up on those moving out of membership? (Darlington, considering the South East)
- How do the people of Buxton etc relate to Manchester? Churches in the urban [areas] are very close to give support (East Anglia, considering Manchester and Stockport).
- Strengths: student population. High % of population in Peak. Weaknesses: above average % decline (Isle of Man, considering Sheffield).
- Lots of little chapels, few large centres. Historical legacy of Methodist Church being the main church in smaller communities (Leeds, considering Cornwall).
- Impossible to comment on this with so little information at hand. Very small number of funerals per minister (roughly four). In Lincolnshire – 15 per minister! (Lincolnshire, considering London)
- Four times the size of Liverpool but similar population. Many smaller churches (average membership) (Liverpool, considering Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- Geographic challenges were noted. [...] number of smaller churches. Strength: 50% more people engaged in faith exploration than M&S (Manchester and Stockport, considering East Anglia).
- It could be seen as a strength that the focus is quite specifically Welsh-language centred. However, this could also be a challenge, particularly as there does not seem to be a huge people resource for the future. Perhaps being smaller could mean a quicker, more flexible approach to local situations (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, considering Synod Cymru).

- Strength: smaller decline (marginally). Challenge: overlapping churches in certain areas. Loss of younger people and low birth rate. As a district, there are difficulties of physical location and separation (Lancashire, considering the Channel Islands).
 - Sparsity of Methodists in an area with fast population growth is a concern – makes mission even harder. Large recruitment loss – need to make more disciples. Relatively high numbers of children/young people. Large mission field in AGAPE. Good numbers of weddings and baptisms (Nottingham and Derby, considering BEH).
 - The scattered nature of your churches in the north of your district – we think this must make things challenging for you (Northampton, considering West Yorkshire).
 - There is a ministry in baptisms. Greater density of population – transport may not be a challenge (Plymouth and Exeter, considering Chester and Stoke-on-Trent).
 - Strengths: seem to be retaining people in the churches. Doing lots of baptisms/confirmations – can this be built upon? Depth of relationships in island community. Challenges: static community (Sheffield, considering the Isle of Man).
 - Strengths: membership committed. Keswick Bible Week. Serving the community. Challenges: small average membership. Dispersed membership – difficult travelling terrain. Flood and ‘Foot & Mouth’ – has this brought about a better community and a need for God? Need for young leader training (Southampton, considering Cumbria).
 - *No response (West Yorkshire, considering Northampton).*
 - Explore why fall off since 2010 (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, considering Liverpool).
 - Less baptisms. No identity of baptisms – not bringing in families (York and Hull, considering Bristol).
 - The strength of having more resources – people and money – in a smaller geographical area. Is there the challenge of complacency for the district with the smallest percentage decrease? (Scotland and Shetland, considering Birmingham)
 - Similar to those facing BEH District (BEH, considering Nottingham and Derby).
- **What might God be saying to the District, through this information?**
- We think it might be encouragement to love and support the outlying rural chapels. To think if there are possibilities for uniting congregations and rationalising plant in the city (Synod Cymru, considering Nottingham and Derby).
 - What opportunities may be grown through baptism contacts? More opportunity to share good practice, being a compact district (Wales Synod, considering Bolton and Rochdale).
 - *No response (Birmingham, considering Scotland and Shetland).*
 - The same as to our district, but with a Welsh accent (Bolton and Rochdale, considering the Wales Synod).
 - Evangelism programme for the adherents. Grow membership. Any further reduction of circuits, joining churches. Contextual evangelism. Movement of funds resources to support outreach. Key mission. Pastoral task mission to [...]. Why low 13+ baptism ratio? Church

members? Connecting with incoming 'people' new congregations host other congregations? (Cumbria, considering Southampton)

- How do we make more disciples? How do we deepen existing disciples in an authentic way? (Channel Islands, considering Lancashire)
- *No response (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent, considering Plymouth and Exeter).*
- *No response (Cornwall, considering Leeds).*
- Make more disciples! Focus on moving from attendance to membership (Darlington, considering the South East).
- *No response (East Anglia, considering Manchester and Stockport).*
- Mission and evangelism priority (Isle of Man, considering Sheffield).
- Does the recent increase in membership reflect the fact that for the last 10 years approx. (Steve Wild as Chair) the priority has been evangelism – work started 10 years ago has gradually been showing fruit starting about 5 years ago? (Leeds, considering Cornwall)
- Why is the attendance in faster decline than membership – how can the churches seek to achieve a greater response re attendance? The ministers need to relate to the community through the commemoration of rites of passage (Lincolnshire, considering London).
- More buildings than needed (Liverpool, considering Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- We don't feel we have enough information to say. Pray! (Manchester and Stockport, considering East Anglia)
- Perhaps to engage in realistic self-assessment. To consider what the future might be. What might the missional opportunities be in the areas served with the resources they have available? What is the current trend for the number of Welsh-speakers? (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, considering Synod Cymru)
- Difficult to tell just through statistics. Keep on whatever is leading to new members (Lancashire, considering the Channel Islands).
- Need to make disciples – and you've got a large number to work on in the AGAPE people. Follow up on baptisms, weddings, funerals (Nottingham and Derby, considering BEH).
- It's impossible to say! It's not that we don't want to help – the number of circuits might be better than us – they have obviously done some work on Regrouping for Mission – what is the impact? (Northampton, considering West Yorkshire)
- The same as what God is saying to us. Find out what God is doing and join in! (Plymouth and Exeter, considering Chester and Stoke-on-Trent)
- Use new members being made as a resource for leading/nurturing others (Sheffield, considering the Isle of Man).
- Rural is more stable. That young people need to be trained and nurtured. Continue to serve communities where they are. What happened in 2006 that so many people joined? (Southampton, considering Cumbria)

- Too early to say from the figures but we would value an ongoing relationship to help us and the Northampton District reflect on mission (West Yorkshire, considering Northampton).
 - The same as God is saying to the W&S District: don't be afraid of failure. Look at alternative ways of being a Christian community (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, considering Liverpool).
 - *No response (York and Hull, considering Bristol).*
 - Wouldn't it be good if you could share some of your resources with Scotland! (In Scotland our very small membership base means that it is quite challenging to find people to take on leadership roles. Although we recognise that it's not this simple, but we did think that finding such people must be much easier in a district like Birmingham.) (Scotland and Shetland, considering Birmingham)
 - To prioritise mission for urban and rural areas in appropriate ways to the context (BEH, considering Nottingham and Derby).
- **In light of these statistics, what do you think might be the way forward for the District?**
- See above! (Synod Cymru, considering Nottingham and Derby)
 - It's hard for us to comment with the information we have to hand without knowledge of the people and context (Wales Synod, considering Bolton and Rochdale).
 - *No response (Birmingham, considering Scotland and Shetland).*
 - As with us, need to pray and ask way forward of God. Perhaps there is a need to concentrate more on places with growth potential (Bolton and Rochdale, considering the Wales Synod).
 - Settle down circuits. Region mission plan district? Circuit mission plan. Release resources – less Supers – for mission focus. Younger ages retirement capture. Rural mission worker? Pastoral visitor/mission. Also look at SSM min in LAs? Rate of loss 40% - 10 years 4% year = 25 years? (Cumbria, considering Southampton)
 - Need to identify what is causing these statistics to understand what is happening (Channel Islands, considering Lancashire).
 - Not enough detail to be able to say! (Chester and Stoke-on-Trent, considering Plymouth and Exeter)
 - *No response (Cornwall, considering Leeds).*
 - Look at distribution and use of resources (Darlington, considering the South East).
 - Combining some 1-2 minister circuits to form a more supportive area. Peak District Circuit? (East Anglia, considering Manchester and Stockport)
 - As above (Isle of Man, considering Sheffield).
 - *No response (Leeds, considering Cornwall).*
 - *No response (Lincolnshire, considering London).*

- How to encourage mission and evangelism among smaller societies (Liverpool, considering Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury).
- *No response (Manchester and Stockport, considering East Anglia).*
- To engage with the local communities, particularly families. To be intentional about inter-generational mission and ministry. Get out of church and be a presence on local communities. NB We admit that we don't really have much knowledge of the situation in Wales, so not sure how relevant our comments are (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, considering Synod Cymru).
- *No response (Lancashire, considering the Channel Islands).*
- See above (Nottingham and Derby, considering BEH).
- We don't have the context. What is God saying to the Church as a whole – maybe we should link to the workshops yesterday. Should we be more ecumenical in our working? (Northampton, considering West Yorkshire)
- On your knees. And please can we work together, we feel lost? (Plymouth and Exeter, considering Chester and Stoke-on-Trent)
- Keep doing what you are doing well (Sheffield, considering the Isle of Man).
- Percentage would be helpful instead of 'colours.' Some consolidation – more 'walking' together (Southampton, considering Cumbria).
- *No response (West Yorkshire, considering Northampton).*
- Make Sundays fun for children/young people. Consider how foodbanks, hospital chaplaincy, schools work, prison visiting would help to take 'church' out into the community. Convey a sense of urgency without panic (Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, considering Liverpool).
- *No response (York and Hull, considering Bristol).*
- We didn't really have time to discuss this question, but it would have been good to have a longer conversation with the Birmingham reps. Despite the fact that we sat right in front of the Birmingham District at the Conference we had very little conversation with them. This is always the case at the Conference which seems a pity (Scotland and Shetland, considering Birmingham).
- Identify and implement District Development Plan (BEH, considering Nottingham and Derby).