

## Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions: a response to Notice of Motion 103, 2013

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	For decision
<b>Draft Resolutions</b>	49/1. The Council receives the report.  49/2. The Council directs that a facility be set up for Circuits and Districts to record Fresh Expressions that would not otherwise be included among returns for Local Churches.  49/3. The Council directs that, alongside continuing consideration of ecclesiological, pastoral and oversight issues and drawing on existing work and other models, the Connexional Team makes a study of how to map and report these and other associations of Methodist people which do not fit precisely into existing structures.  49/4. The Council directs the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee to ensure that work is undertaken with regards to the oversight and governance of Fresh Expressions.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	Joint response from the Faith and Order Committee and the Ministries Committee to Notice of Motion 103 (2013) 'Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions'
<b>Main Points</b>	Recording, Celebrating and Supporting Fresh Expressions Ecclesiological Questions
<b>Background Context</b>	Notice of Motion 103 (2013)
<b>Consultations</b>	Convenor of the Law and Polity Committee Connexional Missioner The Statistics and Mapping Research Officer Venture FX Co-ordinator Members of the Fresh Expressions Network

### Summary of Impact

<b>Faith and Order</b>	Possible
<b>Financial</b>	Likely
<b>Personnel</b>	Likely
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	Possible

## Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions

### 1.1. The Conference of 2013 adopted Notice of Motion 103 recognising:

“that there are a number of weaknesses in the current way we record the variety and creativity of FX communities and Pioneering Projects in our Statistics for Mission. In particular we do not have a mechanism for recording those Fresh Expressions of Church that are truly pioneering and therefore not linked to an existing Methodist Society (or LEP). Many of them are, or are emerging into, churches in their own right but are not recorded as such. Secondly, recording them as ‘groups’ within existing churches does not inspire the desired intention that they grown to become an ecclesial community in their own right and mature as a fresh expression of church.” A full copy of the Notice of Motion can be found in Appendix 1.

### 1.2. The Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee were asked to consider the implications of this work for the Methodist Church’s understanding of its ecclesiology. The Ministries Committee was asked to liaise with the Connexional Team to develop proposals for how this immensely significant work can be properly supported, celebrated and recorded. The Faith and Order Committee and Ministries Committee bring a joint report to Methodist Council, and have consulted with the Connexional Missioner, the Statistics and Mapping Research Officer, members of the Fresh Expressions Network and the Venture FX Coordinator.

### 1.3. The diversity and developmental nature of fresh expressions of church present a complexity that requires thorough and careful consideration. This has been a consistent challenge in seeking to respond to the Notice of Motion, and although much work is being undertaken progress may not be sensibly achieved as quickly as first intended. Therefore much of the work described in this report is still at a preliminary stage.

## Recording Fresh Expressions

### 2.1 Every three years a report on the annual membership returns is presented to the Conference as required by Standing Order 305(2). This has been the platform for using a variety of statistical information to offer to the Conference a more detailed picture of the activity and composition of the Methodist Church in Britain (*Statistics for Mission 2013*, 1.4 and 1.5). Such information assists the Conference in engaging in pastoral conversation on the Work of God, for example as under clause 23f of the *Deed of Union*. Methodists have generally recognised the usefulness of statistics to the Church’s mission and ministry, while acknowledging its limitations (*Statistics for Mission 2013*, 1.2).

### 2.2. Under the present system, Methodist Societies (Local Churches) are the primary focus for data collection and statistical reporting. Methodist numbers therefore comprise a membership measure, made up of people who belong to a Methodist Society, as well as measures of attendance at Local Church services and of numbers who might be considered to come within the pastoral care of a Local Church (the “Community Roll”). More recently, statistics have also included information on the range of “groups and outreach activities” associated with, and reported by, individual Local Churches.

### 2.3. Fresh Expressions have sometimes struggled to be satisfactorily recorded within this framework. Some originate otherwise than through association with a particular Local Church. Others, though they may have originated as a “group” or “outreach activity” associated with a Local Church, have evolved into something more than this, so that to report

them as such is no longer adequate.

- 2.4. The Research and Statistics for Mission Office has found that such Fresh Expressions are generally keen to be counted among Methodist numbers, and to be reported within the range of missions and ministries over which the Conference has oversight. However, further work is needed to determine how they might be mapped onto the picture of Methodism that emerges as a result.

### **Celebrating Fresh Expressions**

- 3.1 There are multiple dimensions to the concept of celebrating this work. A small and concise piece of work is being tasked to compile a current dossier of links for information.
- 3.2. One example is the welcome service of a maturing fresh expression of church being established as an identified Methodist Church in the Circuit. A small but significant number of fresh expressions have become a church of the circuit in which they reside. These welcome services have been written and agreed through their District and Circuit bodies and may offer some examples of how best to celebrate this aspect of maturing fresh expressions. This is not the whole picture for celebrating this significant work but it is some visible practice that has worked well.
- 3.3. Another type of example can be found on the Fresh Expressions website and specifically the stories pages. They regularly carry news that celebrates this significant work of God and has been one of the most effective methods of inspiring many others to go and try. ([www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories)) Alternatively you can view the 'On demand' page with regular month podcasts with a wide range of material and information, sharing and celebrate God's action in and through *fresh expressions of church*.

### **Supporting Fresh Expressions**

- 4.1 Three strands have come together to help answer the perhaps most urgent request of supporting fresh expressions at the grassroots. The national Fresh Expressions team asked for a mechanism by which the growing partnership could continue to be resourced by the small team, the idea of each partner forming a hub to act as an interface was suggested (strand 1). Notice of Motion 103 asked the same question but from the grassroots upwards (strand 2). A conversation was asked for between the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) and Fresh Expressions as to how a collaborative way of working could be imagined to support fresh expressions within the regions (strand 3).
- 4.2. Over the last year these strands and conversations have progressed the concept of a denominational hub that has both a connexional focus and a regional outworking. After good collaboration with members of the Connexional Team, District Chairs and DMLN Coordinators, a pilot consultation for such a Hub is to be established, exploring the parameters and to aid regional support at the grassroots. A list of regional 'champions/advocates' has been identified and in conjunction with the pioneer pathway development, will offer a tangible framework covering: Vocational Discernment, Community of Practice, Coaching/Mentoring, Formal Learning and developing a Personal Portfolio.
- 4.3. Gathering these advocates several times a year for the Connexional Hub, aspires to capture a more accurate narrative of the developing needs, challenges and opportunities presented across the Connexion, thus informing appropriate strategy and action of both the Fresh Expressions Team and the Connexional Team.

- 4.4. One further aspect of support which the Ministries Committee presents to the Methodist Council for discussion is the practical resources of the central work of the national Fresh Expressions team. In 2008 the Archbishops Initiative in partnership with the Methodist Council called Fresh Expressions was established as a Charitable Trust. Much has been achieved across the partnership by a comparatively small amount of investment but this has become a vastly fruitful work. In the Methodist Church alone, there are now over two thousand initiatives, led by more than eleven thousand workers (mainly volunteers) reaching over one-hundred thousand people, most of whom did not previously connect with the Methodist Church. Though some of the core funding comes from the partners there is a significant yearly shortfall, which is not met by the partners or by new work grant funding that is received. The Ministries Committee will return to this matter at one of its future meetings but asks that the Council notes its concern and would be grateful for any advice it is able to give.
- 4.5. The Ministries Committee understands that in the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) to the Methodist Council in May 2014 the possibility was raised in light of the growth in Methodism of *fresh expressions of church*, that the single appointment of a Connexional Missioner be increased by another person being added to the team. The Council is asked to note that the senior person has now been appointed and in the light of that the Ministries Committee will reflect on what recommendations it may wish to bring to a future meeting of the Council in consultation with the SRC.

### **Ecclesiological Questions**

- 5.1 The 2012 Anglican-Methodist report *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* used the definition of the Fresh Expressions initiative, namely:
- “A Fresh Expression is a form of Church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any Church:
- It will come into being through the principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples;
  - It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.” (*Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church (2012)*, 1.1.3 and 2.3.3)
- 5.2. The question of what constitutes “a mature expression of church” is one which requires reflection and discernment. The report affirms the necessity of a “mixed economy” of traditional churches and fresh expressions that “constitute a complementary and mutually enriching partnership in which each learns from the other”. (2.1.11) A truly Catholic and incarnational Church will be culturally relevant and therefore diverse, looking different in different contexts. However, if it is also truly apostolic then there will be a sense of connectivity and different expressions of Church will have characteristics in common. It is argued that a mission-shaped ecclesiology should take proper account of the changing missionary context and the ecclesial dynamics of intensity and connectivity. The report explores the criteria “by which it is possible for the Church of England and the Methodist Church to recognise fresh expressions as churches, according to their respective teaching concerning the nature of the Church” (1.4.10) and identifies eight essential ecclesial elements by which a Christian community can be identified as a church (4.6.1 and 7.3.5). The report concludes that the teaching of the Church of England and the Methodist Church concerning the nature of the Church “itself provides the necessary theological and ecclesiastical framework for the development of fresh expressions”. (7.1.3)

- 5.3. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* makes a significant contribution to, and is a resource for, continuing theological reflection on the ecclesiological questions that fresh expressions provoke. Whilst some of the questions it raises warrant further reflection, it is suggested that there is a period of wider reflection on the theological challenges and insights that fresh expressions provide before any further and more specific work is undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee. Much fresh expressions work is in its infancy and there should be sufficient time and space for its growth and development. Reflections on ecclesiology focussed around the four marks of the church are being encouraged both through Methodist structures and the Fresh Expressions movement, especially in the *Mission Shaped Ministry* course.
- 5.4. The more immediate questions requiring careful consideration relate to questions of oversight, governance and hospitality. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* calls for a 'light touch' to the way in which ecclesiastical discipline is applied to Fresh Expressions, whilst recognising that a permissive interpretation of discipline needs to be balanced by proper and appropriate structures of accountability. It offers no suggestions as to how this can happen. Further work on what forms of oversight are appropriate and enabling for fresh expressions is needed. This requires consideration of appropriate and effective oversight structures and processes, as well as looking at how the Methodist Church might foster supportive relationships and encourage wider ownership of the mission of fresh expressions.
- 5.5. Although, in the light of this response, there is no immediate work to be undertaken by the Law and Polity Committee, having consulted with the Convenor of that Committee it is clear that some further work is required on the oversight and governance of Fresh Expressions.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 49/1. The Council receives the report.**
- 49/2. The Council directs that a facility be set up for Circuits and Districts to record Fresh Expressions that would not otherwise be included among returns for Local Churches.**
- 49/3. The Council directs that, alongside continuing consideration of ecclesiological, pastoral and oversight issues and drawing on existing work and other models, the Connexional Team makes a study of how to map and report these and other associations of Methodist people which do not fit precisely into existing structures.**
- 49/4. The Council directs the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee to ensure that work is undertaken with regards to the oversight and governance of Fresh Expressions.**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Notice of Motion 103: Recording pioneering Fresh Expressions**

The Conference affirms the ongoing work to “develop and respond to growth in the life of the Connexion” (para 2.2 p 473, Ministries Committee report) and also welcomes the General Secretary’s endorsement of Fresh Expressions, as indicated in his report.

However, the Conference recognises that there are a number of weaknesses in the current way we record the variety and creativity of FX communities and Pioneering Projects in our Statistics for Mission. In particular we do not have a mechanism for recording those Fresh Expressions of Church that are truly pioneering and therefore not linked to an existing Methodist Society (or LEP). Many of them are, or are emerging into, churches in their own right but are not recorded as such. Secondly, recording them as ‘groups’ within existing churches does not inspire the desired intention that they grow to become an ecclesial community in their own right and mature as a fresh expression of church.

The Conference directs that:

a) the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee consider the implications of this work for the Methodist Church’s understanding of its ecclesiology;

b) the Ministries Committee liaise with the Connexional Team to develop proposals for how this immensely significant work can be properly supported, celebrated and recorded; and

c) an interim report on a) and b) be brought by the Methodist Council, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, to the 2014 Conference and a full report to the 2015 Conference.

Proposer: Ms Helen Boardman

Seconder: The Revd Leslie M Newton

Signatory 1: The Revd Dr Keith Davies

Signatory 2: Mr David S Walton

Signatory 3: The Revd Anne E Brown

Signatory 4: The Revd Peter Pillinger

Signatory 5: The Revd Steven J Wild

Signatory 6: The Revd Richard J Teal

Signatory 7: The Revd John D Howard

Signatory 8: Mrs Rachel McCallum