

42. Statistics for Mission

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Resolution	42/1. The Conference receives the Report.

Summary of content and impact

Subject and aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical overview of the Methodist Church • Key trends relating to growth and decline • Developments in statistical reporting
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headline membership 188,000 as at 31 October 2016 • 3.5% year-on-year decline over the decade to 2016 • Uneven distribution of Methodist strength and weakness • Recruitment has overtaken retention as main challenge to membership numbers • Attendance patterns can and do buck membership trends

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Statistics are an established part of the Methodist tradition, stretching back to 1766, when membership figures were first published. Almost as old a tradition is caution – even scepticism – in the use to which statistics are put, but in general, Methodists have appreciated being able to analyse their “membership balance-sheet assiduously, locally, regionally and nationally”¹, making them one of the most numerate Christian denominations in Britain.
- 1.2 What is less readily appreciated is that the practical use made of membership statistics has varied greatly over time. To begin with, it was quality, more than quantity, which mattered. Although the founders of the movement wanted as many people as possible to have access to Methodist preaching and ministry, they were careful to count as members only those who had been moved by the experience and persevered in the life of discipleship. Early Methodist statistics were descriptive, distinguishing members who were established in their faith from those less so, with a view to devising pastoral remedies for strengthening discipleship.
- 1.5 Since Methodist union, eighty-five years ago, this assessment has been challenging. Membership numbers have been falling for around a century, and this can sometimes give the impression that the main use of statistics is in managing decline. Many circuit mergers are based on combining membership numbers in a fair and viable way, while Standing Orders mandate the cessation of Local Churches with too few members.² In the 1960s and '70s, the Methodist Sociological Group researched in some detail into the dynamics of membership decline.
- 1.6 A conscious attempt to reverse this emphasis was made in 2002, with the introduction of the current system for collecting and reporting statistics. Not only were returns gathered directly from Local Churches, but the statistics were explicitly geared to providing “vital support in planning mission strategies, both locally and connexionally.”³ Attendance figures were

¹ Clive Field, *Religious Statistics in Great Britain: An Historical Introduction* (University of Manchester 2010), p. 18.

² SO 605(2) and see also SO 601, 612.

³ *Statistics for Mission 2005 – 2007*, 2008 Conference Agenda, p. 578.

promoted alongside membership numbers, and work was begun to measure attendance at missional activities other than church services. Online data capture was also introduced. These initiatives are what are still known as 'Statistics for Mission'.

- 1.7 This work has been given new urgency by the promotion of a risk management policy for the Methodist Church in Great Britain, which is described in the annual report and accounts. The most significant corporate risk there identified is "inability to create new Methodist disciples [that] results in further decline, ultimately resulting in the Methodist Church ceasing to exist." A related operational risk is that the statistical returns fail to provide firm enough evidence to support planning to turn round decline.
- 1.8 Statistics thus takes its place in risk management and planning activity at all levels of the Methodist Church. It should also be seen as assisting in the setting of priorities recently reaffirmed when the themes of *Our Calling* were rehearsed, namely: that the Church exists for Worship, Service, Learning and Caring, and Evangelism, ie to make more followers of Jesus Christ.⁴
- 1.9 This present report therefore proceeds to:
 - provide a statistical overview of the present state of the Methodist Church, based on the latest annual returns;
 - analyse some of the factors that have led to this condition;
 - note recent developments in statistical reporting

2. Overview

- 2.1 The statistical year runs to 31 October. Membership statistics are reported to the Conference every three years.⁵ This part of the report presents an overview on membership and related statistics as at 31 October 2016, three years after the last triennial statistics report.

Membership

- 2.2 Membership is a 'people' measure, counting those who have made and sustained a formal commitment to the Methodist Church. The principle in Methodism is that such people can be not only counted but named, although there is no centralised database or register of names.
- 2.3 Except for Methodist ministers, whose membership is held by the Conference, and for a number of Methodists serving with the armed forces, individual membership is held from a particular Local Church.
- 2.4 **As at 31 October 2016, Methodist local church membership stood at 188,398.** There were 3,459 Methodist ministers and 21 members on the Methodist Forces Board roll.
- 2.5 Year-on-year changes in membership numbers have long ceased to impact significantly on the proportion of the population that can be said to be Methodist. The annual rise in the population of Great Britain (approximately 380,000) is currently around double the figure for total Methodist membership. Just under three in every thousand people are members of Methodist Churches, compared with just over four-and-a-half ten years ago.
- 2.6 Membership is concentrated in certain parts of the country. Areas of relative Methodist strength, where member numbers can approach and sometimes even exceed one per cent of the resident population, are Cornwall, Devon and the North, and certain Circuits in Lincolnshire and elsewhere in the East Midlands. Conversely, there are Circuits where

⁴ See the 2014 *Our Calling* statement released as www.methodist.org.uk/media/1443785/our_calling_-_priorities_201415.pdf

⁵ SO 305(2).

Methodist membership comprises less than 0.2 or even 0.1 per cent of the resident population, such as in Scotland, London and the South East.

- 2.7 Circuits have been reconfigured to concentrate Methodist strength at local level as overall numbers decline. This has been explored in some detail in the ‘Regrouping for Mission’ research response.⁶ What is apparent is that, although significant circuit restructuring has brought the overall number of Circuits down in line with the reduction in overall membership numbers, this process has been very uneven. There are now 368 Circuits even more widely distributed in terms of membership numbers than the 570 that existed before significant restructuring in 2007 (Table 1).

Table 1: Effect of Circuit restructuring on membership numbers, 2007-2016

Year	Number of Circuits	Membership			
		Maximum	Minimum	Average (mean)	Standard deviation
2007	570	1,905	26	489	287
2016	368	3,053	29	574	396

Attendance at worship

- 2.8 Attendance is a footfall measure. A hundred attendances does not necessarily mean a hundred people attending. If numbers turn up for worship twice on a day, then both congregations are added together – even if they include the same people. ‘Average Weekly Attendance’ is the sum of attendances actually recorded for the first four Sundays in October and the weekdays following, divided by four.
- 2.9 **Based on the 2016 ‘October count’, Average Weekly Attendance in Methodist Local Churches was 202,100.** Three quarters of all attendances are accounted for by adults (aged 20 and over) at Sunday services; 11 per cent by adults at weekday services; 9 per cent by young people at Sunday services and 5 per cent by young people at weekday services.
- 2.10 Attendance is dispersed over 4,512 Local Churches (as at end of October 2016) and unevenly distributed over a small number of large churches and a large number of small churches. Table 2 divides total attendance into five equal fifths – the top fifth accounted for by the largest churches and the bottom fifth by the smallest. 5 per cent of churches by number – the largest churches – account for 20 per cent of total attendance. On the other hand, there are over 2,400 churches in the bottom fifth with attendances of 33 or under, including over 1,100 churches with an average weekly attendance of fifteen or fewer.

Table 2: Local Churches grouped by Average Weekly Attendance, 2016

			Smallest	Average	Largest
Top fifth	205 churches	(5% of total)	133	197	555
Second fifth	387 churches	(9% of total)	86	104	132
Third fifth	580 churches	(13% of total)	56	70	86
Fourth fifth	926 churches	(20% of total)	33	44	56
Bottom fifth	2,414 churches	(53% of total)	0 ⁷	17	33

⁶ MC/16/37 (April 2016) and MC/17/66 (April 2017).

⁷ Some congregations meet seasonally, so report no October attendance.

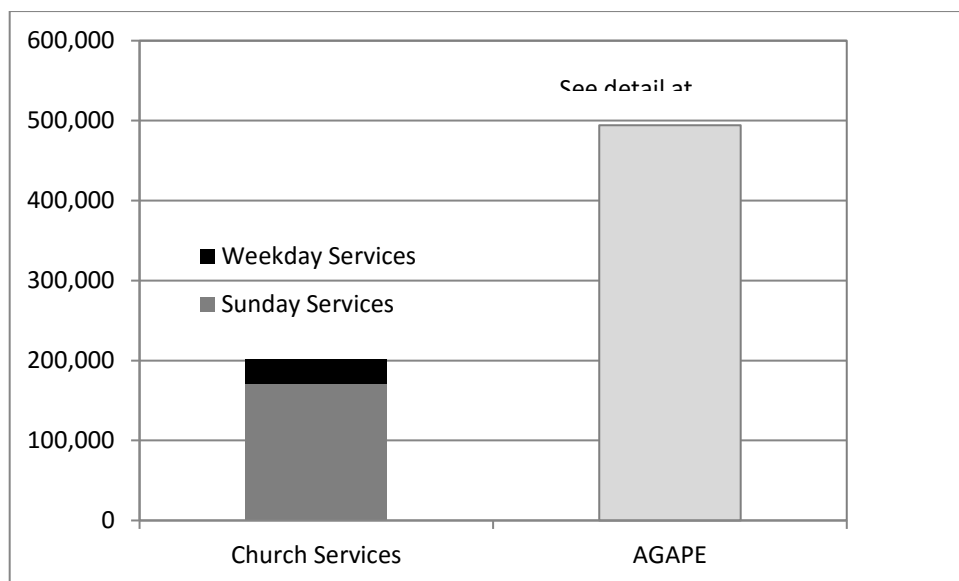
- 2.11 Actual congregations may be smaller than these figures suggest. Weekly attendance may be spread over Sunday and weekday services, and Sunday attendance may itself be split, especially in larger churches. The definition of a 'large' church might conveniently be set as one with a total weekly attendance above the average for the top quintile of churches (ie 197). Of sixty-four such large churches (accounting for around 9 per cent of all Methodist worship attendance), some have Sunday evening as well as Sunday morning services; some have separate services for different ethnically or culturally configured congregations; and some have weekday missional services that count towards worship attendance.
- 2.12 Attendance may also be split across several church sites. Recent mergers of neighbouring churches, together with the application of the procedure whereby the smallest churches become classes of a larger church, have resulted in a growing number of multi-site churches. The difference between 4,512 *churches* and their corresponding 4,946 *church sites* is accounted for by over eight per cent of all churches now being multi-site, including over forty churches with three sites or more.⁸
- 2.13 Similarly, the difference between 4,512 churches in 2016 and 4,812 churches in 2013 includes 46 churches merged and 39 churches subsumed as classes of a neighbouring church, leaving a reduction of 215 Methodist worship sites.

Attendance at other activities

- 2.14 Attendance is also measured for other Activities, Groups, Associations, Programmes and Events (AGAPE) that are not counted as 'public services' of worship but which form part of the church's mission and ministry. It is left to churches and Circuits to distinguish these activities from other activities (eg for income-generation) that may be held on their premises but are not directly part of their mission and ministry. According to local context, some types of activity, such as a cafe or surgery, may fall on either side of the divide.
- 2.15 AGAPE attendance is not measured with the same accuracy as the October count. Nevertheless, from what is reported about usual attendance numbers for each individual activity, together with how often such activities are held, a "standardised" weekly attendance figure can be calculated that scores (for example) an activity held twice weekly at four times that of the same activity being held fortnightly.
- 2.16 The Standardised Weekly Attendance figure has been introduced with some caveats. An 'attendance' may mean very different things in very different contexts, whereas the measure gives equal weighting to individual attendances at (say) a church coffee morning, a campaign rally, a support group, a night-shelter session or to visits to a shop or festival event. The measure also cannot readily distinguish between those who may be organisers of an event or activity and those who are users, clients or invitees; those who simply 'turn up'; or those who know each other so well as to make such distinctions meaningless. And while the measure works for purposive or organised meeting, it does not really do so for the many unplanned, occasional or opportunistic sorts of encounter that characterise much good pastoral or chaplaincy work.

Figure 1: Methodist Weekly Attendances (2016): Church Services and AGAPE

⁸ There are now churches with six, seven and eight different sites.

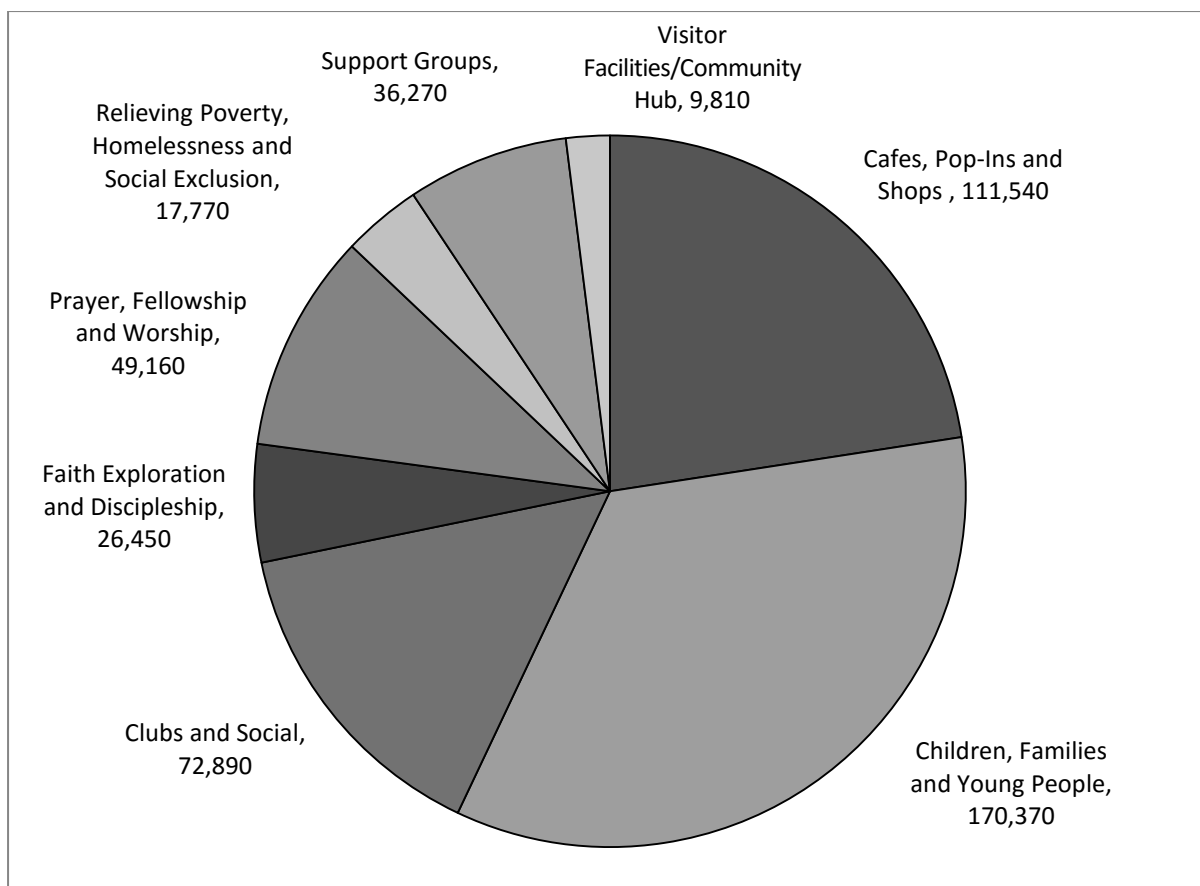


2.17 That said, Standardised Weekly Attendance is a useful indicator of the extent and balance of the many types work carried on from Methodist churches and in Methodist circuits. It also offers a comparison with statistically measured attendance at public worship, to give an indication of the breadth of Methodist activity additional to church services. Based on these indicative measures, there are an estimated 490,000 to 500,000 weekly AGAPE attendances to set alongside the 202,000 Average Weekly Attendances at Methodist Church services. This is illustrated at Figure 1, which could suggest that around only a quarter of Methodism is about Sunday services and that the great majority of the other three quarters is about Methodism’s wider work.

2.18 Figure 2 shows the breakdown between different types of AGAPE activity. Attendances at cafes, pop-ins and shops tend to be larger and looser than for faith exploration, prayer and fellowship groups, accounting for their larger ‘slice of the pie’. Of over 26,200 separate events and activities, 1,000 report attendances of 100 or more: these include festivals and exhibitions in the ‘Community Hub’ category, and many of the larger activity events in the Children/Family category, and account for 29 per cent of the pie. On the other hand, there are around 19,400 small groups with regular attendance of 25 or less: these include many in the Prayer/Fellowship and Faith Exploration categories and account for 37 per cent of the pie.

Figure 2: Weekly AGAPE Attendance (2016): Breakdown by Category (see overleaf)

2.19 AGAPE activity used to be divided between ‘out-reach’ and ‘in-reach’. This distinction is no longer rigid, in that while 79 per cent of all activities are reportedly intended for ‘regular churchgoers’, 71 per cent are intended for ‘irregular churchgoers’ and 68 per cent for ‘non-churchgoers’. 46 per cent of activities are reportedly intended for all three categories – that is, effectively open to all. The two categories which have a significantly lower proportion of activities open to, or orientated towards non-churchgoers are Prayer/Fellowship and Faith Exploration, suggesting that these remain a resource primarily intended for (generally small) groups of established churchgoers.



2.20 Ages of AGAPE attendees are not recorded. Nevertheless, the figures can be used to estimate the probability of an AGAPE activity being attended by people from different age bands. Taken overall, there is a 61 per cent probability that attendance at an AGAPE event will include someone in their sixties, compared with only a 38 per cent probability that it will include someone in their twenties. These figures vary, of course, depending on the type of activity. The Hospitality (cafes, pop-ins and shops) category tends to be the most all age, with a more than 60 per cent overall probability of someone from *any* age group being present. By contrast, attendance at prayer and fellowship groups is less than 10 per cent likely to have representation from young adults (under 20 years), as compared with 25 per cent from people in their thirties, 68 per cent from people in their fifties and 91 per cent from people in their seventies.

2.21 Seventy-one per cent of all AGAPE activities are run wholly or partly by volunteers; 19 per cent by officeholders; 19 per cent by Local Preachers; 17 per cent by presbyters; 8 per cent by paid employees; and 2 per cent by deacons.⁹ Volunteer leadership is widespread throughout the range of AGAPE categories, whereas leadership by presbyters is more concentrated on Faith Exploration and Support groups, and Local Preachers' leadership on Faith Exploration and Fellowship groups.

2.22 The connexional database records 3,226 lay employee posts, many of them relating to premises and administrative support.

⁹ These percentages sum to over 100 because some groups and activities may have more than one type of leader to run them.

2.23 Children and Family work, which accounts for over one third of all AGAPE activity, constitutes a distinctive category that straddles both ‘ministry’ and ‘support’.¹⁰ This is reflected in the range of activities, from young people’s groups, crèches, uniformed groups, Family Centres, parenting sessions, Messy Church and activity days. There is considerable variation in group size and group dynamics, and high levels of orientation to ‘regular churchgoers’ (87 per cent of activities), ‘irregular churchgoers’ (83 per cent) and ‘non-churchgoers’ (86 per cent) alike. This is also the category where the involvement of older people would appear to be significantly lower than for other categories of AGAPE activity.

3. Trends in growth and decline

3.1 **Since the previous triennial report (2014), membership numbers have fallen annually by around 6,780, or 3.6 per cent year-on-year. Over the ten-year period from 2006 to 2016, membership has fallen from 262,972 to 188,398:** that is, by an average of 3.5 per cent year-on-year. This is high in historic terms. Year-on-year losses averaged 2 per cent in the decade to 1997 and 1.5 per cent in the decade before that.

3.2 In times past, it was retention loss that posed the greater challenge to membership numbers. Table 3 shows the situation for comparable triennial periods in each of the last five decades and shows that, up until the 1990s, the main difficulty was in members leaving or drifting away rather than in a failure to make members in the first place. Since that time, a significant falling-off in new membership numbers means there are fewer members to drift away, and the main loss now comes from the death of committed members.

Table 3: Membership recruitment and retention loss for comparable triennia, 1973-76 to 2013-16

	<u>1973-76</u>	<u>1983-86</u>	<u>1993-96</u>	<u>2003-06</u>	<u>2013-16</u>
Brought forward	570,331	458,592	399,322	304,971	208,738
Less recruitment loss	- 6,778	- 4,296	- 12,385	- 17,258	- 11,254
Less retention loss	- 35,183	- 16,506	- 15,507	- 17,741	- 9,086
Carried forward	528,370	437,790	371,430	269,972	188,398
Percentage of decline					
Recruitment	16.15	20.65	44.40	49.31	55.33
Retention	83.85	79.35	55.60	50.69	44.67
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Recruitment

3.3 55 per cent of total net loss over the triennial period is now recruitment loss. Churches are not making enough (generally younger) new members to offset the number of (generally older) members who die each year. While 83 per cent of Methodism’s 4,512 churches reported at least one member death over the course of the last three years, fewer than half

¹⁰ See *We are Family: The Changing Face of Family Ministry* (TMCP 2015), p. 13, which characterises the ‘Ministry’ strand as “concerned with matters relating to faith and spirituality: prayer, worship, knowledge and understanding of Christian life and practice, as well as evangelistic activities”, and the ‘Support’ strand as “designed to offer activities and programmes that are practical, emotional, mental, and generally related to well-being.”

(43 per cent) reported *any* new members, and fewer than 3 per cent made new members in each of those years.

- 3.4 There are 589 churches that are growing through recruitment (ie where new members exceed deaths over the triennial period), of which 350 are growing overall (ie 2016 membership exceeds 2013 membership). Recruitment is heavily concentrated in a relatively small number of churches: during the triennial period, half of all new members joined just 380 churches, while a quarter joined just 122 churches. Recruitment is not, however, disproportionately concentrated in large churches. Of the 176 churches which in 2015/2016 recruited one new member for every fifteen or fewer existing members, just thirteen had average membership of over one hundred: the remainder were evenly spread across churches with smaller membership sizes.¹¹
- 3.5 There is little correlation between new members and baptisms. Baptisms are similarly concentrated in a relatively small number of churches, but these tend not to be those with the greatest numbers of new members. During the triennial period, half of all baptisms took place in 463 churches, while just 132 churches accounted for a quarter of baptisms. Over 30 per cent of Methodist churches (1,393 out of 4,512) reported no baptisms in any of the three years of the triennium.
- 3.6 With *adult* baptisms, however, the correlation is more pronounced. The 463 churches accounting for half of all new members account for 39 per cent of adult baptisms, while the 132 churches accounting for a quarter of all new members account for 22 per cent of adult baptisms. Overall numbers of baptisms have fallen at around twice the rate of membership decline in recent years, and have halved since 2002, but numbers of adult baptisms have held up by comparison. In 2015/2016 there were 615 adult baptisms (compared with 674 in 2001/2002): these account for around 8 per cent of the 7,776 baptisms reported that year.

Retention

- 3.7 45 per cent of total net membership loss over the triennial period is retention loss. This is much more of an issue in some Methodist Districts than in others. There are ten Districts where losses from members moving out or moving on exceed losses from the excess of deaths over new members. These include Synod Cymru, all Districts in the North West region¹², Nottingham and Derby, and London, where retention accounts for 87 per cent of all membership loss. Seven of these Districts suffered greater-than-average overall membership loss over the triennial period, and three less-than-average, including London, where a 3.6 per cent decline in membership numbers compares very favourably with the 9.7 per cent connexional average. Exceptionally in London, new member numbers approach the number of membership deaths,¹³ leaving the main dynamic to play out in transfers and ceasing-to-meet. Much of this loss – especially on the transfer side – will be the result of home-moves and life-course progression, rather than ‘decline’ as such.
- 3.8 Retention should in theory be reflected in worship attendance numbers. Aggregate membership and worship attendance figures are in fact fairly similar, and move generally in the same direction and at the same rate. Average weekly attendance has been falling by

¹¹ Excluded from the count are churches with average annual membership of under fifteen (mean of 2015 and 2016). Very few large churches achieve (and sustain) one new member for every ten or fewer existing members – there being just one in 2015/2016.

¹² ie Cumbria, Lancashire, Bolton and Rochdale, Manchester and Stockport, Liverpool, Chester and Stoke-on-Trent.

¹³ In London, new members cover 92 per cent of member deaths, compared with the 39 per cent connexional average. See the chapter by A Piggot on Methodist growth and decline in London since 1980 in A P Cooper and D Goodhew (eds) *No Secular City: London's Churches 1980 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

around 7,500 a year during the triennial period, from 224,500 in 2013, representing a 3.4 per cent year-on-year decline. Over the ten-year period from 2006 to 2016, average weekly attendance has fallen from 286,500 to 202,100, again by an average of 3.4 per cent year-on-year.

- 3.9 However, a more meaningful comparison might be between membership and *adult* (aged 20 and over) attendance figures, which have fallen from 227,000 to 173,900 over the decade, or by an average of 2.6 per cent year-on-year. Young persons' attendance has fallen much more steeply by contrast, with teenage attendance less than half what it was in 2006 and pre-school-age attendance down by nearly three quarters. 60 per cent of young persons' attendance is now made up of children in the 5-to 12-year-old range, and 40 per cent of *this* attendance is at weekday, not Sunday services (compared with 12 per cent for adults). There are 2,203 churches where fewer than one in twenty of the Sunday congregation is aged under 20, including 1,463 churches which reported *no* young person coming to a Sunday service in October 2016.
- 3.10 Measured by worship attendance, Methodism would appear to be retaining most of its adult members while fast losing children to replace them. But this conclusion needs to be qualified by two important facts. First, we do not know how many adults attending church services are actually members, as opposed to 'adherents', guests and visitors, whose attendance may be occasional rather than regular: there may be those who simply 'turn up'. Secondly, we do not actually know patterns of attendance for members themselves, ie members' attendance will not be retained if (while still retaining their membership) they come to church less frequently than before.
- 3.11 Table 4 analyses comparative changes in churches' membership and average weekly attendance figures over the triennial period, sorting them into four basic categories on the basis of whether these measures have respectively gone up or down.

Table 4: Local Churches: movements in membership and average Weekly Attendance 2013 to 2016

Number of churches	Membership 2013 – 2016	Average Weekly Attendance 2013-2016	Aggregate membership change	Aggregate Weekly Attendance change	
				All Age	(Under 20s)
682	UP	UP	+ 2,459	+ 10,211	+ 2,637
843	UP	DOWN	+ 2,671	- 11,407	- 3,214
1,065	DOWN	UP	- 6,831	+ 14,468	+ 4,596
1,922	DOWN	DOWN	- 15,868	- 31,455	- 7,929

- 3.12 682 churches (15 per cent of the total) are straightforwardly holding their own or growing, with membership numbers reflected in attendance growth¹⁴. 1,922 churches (43 per cent) are

¹⁴ NB(1) for some churches 'growth' will be the result of incorporating members and churchgoers from other Methodist churches merged or closed during the triennial period. Members and churchgoers of such churches 'lost to Methodism' will not be counted among the aggregate change figures here reported; (2) for convenience's sake, churches reporting the same membership in 2016 as in 2013 are here counted in the 'Membership Up' category.

straightforwardly declining, with membership and attendance figures both down. For these two categories, attendance figures would appear to be a far more visible indicator than membership as to whether a church is growing or declining, with much greater flows in and out.¹⁵

- 3.13 There are 1,908 churches (43 per cent) where membership and attendance have moved in opposite directions. Churches where attendance is growing despite falling membership numbers contribute more to attendance growth – particularly among young people – than do churches where attendance and membership are both growing in tandem.
- 3.14 These figures are suggestive rather than conclusive. They point to:
- Churches being exposed to greater volatility in the numbers they attract, or fail to attract, to their church services than changes in their membership numbers suggest;
 - Much of this volatility coming from non-members and children’s attendance, or non-attendance, rather than from members attending services more or less frequently.
- 3.15 This in turn will have an impact on what is meant by ‘retention’, which may be less about keeping members regular in their attendance at church and more about managing a disparate range of attendance patterns, from ‘one-off’ to week-by-week appearances, whether by members or not.

Re-assembly

- 3.16 Just as a church’s strength in membership may not be reflected in service attendance numbers, attendance may not necessarily involve people ‘coming to church’. Some Methodist communities have evolved, wholly or in part, not as societies of members, or as worshipping congregations, but as other sorts of community involved in the church’s mission and ministry.
- 3.17 This sort of activity is difficult to quantify. It may represent a slice of Local Churches’ AGAPE activity, ie where groups and activities are still linked to a Local Church but involve people other than regular members or churchgoers. However, as noted at para. 2.22 above, the distinction between activities involving churchgoers and non-churchgoers is no longer rigid. Some AGAPE activities self-identify as ‘Fresh Expressions’, which by one definition is “a form of church... established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.”¹⁶ However, it has proved difficult – on the basis of statistical returns – to distinguish these activities from what churches might otherwise do to refresh their *existing* mission and worship.
- 3.18 Indicatively:
- About 7.5 per cent of all AGAPE activity (around 37,000 out of 495,000 standardised weekly attendances) self-reports as Fresh Expressions;
 - About 12.7 per cent of new AGAPE activity (2013 start date or later) self-reports as Fresh Expressions;
 - New AGAPE activity has averaged around 13,000 weekly attendances each year over the triennial period, with around 1,650 of these self-reporting as Fresh Expressions.
 - It is still unclear as to how much of this new activity represents ‘growth’, as opposed to just ‘turnover’.
- 3.19 Additionally, since 2015, Circuits have been able to report Methodist communities that exist independently of any one church and, while sharing in the Circuit’s mission and ministry, are

¹⁵ For forthcoming research into growing Methodist churches, see “Growing Methodism in the North East”, *the connexion* (Issue 8, Spring 2017).

¹⁶ *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (2012), p. 199.

not constituted as Methodist churches. These ‘Circuit Initiatives’ come in different shapes and sizes, and are sometimes difficult to recognise as such, which may account for a slow start in registering them as *Statistics for Mission*. As at 31 October 2016, forty had been registered. Together, they add 4,600 standardised weekly attendances to the AGAPE count.¹⁷

- 3.20 Examples of Circuit Initiatives include communities based around a messy church; an arts project; a listening and discussion forum; a housing estate outreach project; an army garrison fellowship group; a cafe church; a house of hospitality and prayer; a live-at-home scheme; a social enterprise unit; a charity shop providing work experience; a youth church and a heritage project with Methodist worship. Analysis of Circuit Initiatives registered to date (Table 5) shows a fairly even split between those which originated as self-contained projects, and those which evolved from former Methodist churches, or from classes, church groups or plants. They also show a split between those initiated during the triennial period and those started at a (sometimes much) earlier date and registered retrospectively, suggesting there might be more established initiatives that need to be brought to account.

Table 5: Analysis of Circuit Initiatives reported as at October 2016

	Triennium	Pre-Triennium
Project Origin	15	7
Church Origin	8 (inc. 4 ‘sub-church’)	10 (inc. 3 ‘sub-church’)

- 3.21 There has been one instance of evolution from church group/circuit initiative proceeding towards re-assembly as a new, formally constituted Methodist Local Church.

4. Developments in statistical reporting

- 4.1 This report, and previous statistical reports, have drawn out significant challenges faced by the Methodist Church. They have also shown how these challenges have played out differently in different parts of the Connexion, presenting a richly textured picture and suggesting that different approaches may be required to rise to the challenge, depending on how locally the church focuses on recruiting, retaining or re-assembling its numbers.
- 4.2 In times past, a “report on the annual membership returns”¹⁸ – literally interpreted – was enough to satisfy statistical enquiry. Because not all Methodists were actually members, this picture was fleshed out by churches reporting numbers additional to members on their ‘Community Roll’. Such people were thought of as *potential* members, with the system monitoring stocks and flows from pre-, para- and post-membership categories (principally children, adult ‘adherents’ and ‘ceased to meet’) in and out of formal membership.
- 4.3 The system never worked quite as intended, with a recent survey finding that only about a third of reported Community Roll numbers were readily identifiable as named individuals within their church communities – the rest being more or less accurate estimates of those connected in some other way. Though many churches still operate the Community Roll to provide pastoral care for the names there recorded, it cannot be relied on as an omnibus ‘people measure’ for all churches and Circuits across the Connexion. By way of illustration, in the course of the triennium, non-member numbers on the Community Roll jumped from

¹⁷ Circuit Initiatives may in theory offer public worship services for inclusion in the October count, but only ten of the forty did so (Average Weekly Attendance 108). Not being constituted as Methodist churches, they add nothing to the membership count.

¹⁸ This is still the formal descriptor of the triennial statistical report to be presented to both Sessions of the Methodist Conference (SO 305(2)).

214,000 in 2013 to 374,000 in 2014 (the year the survey was conducted) before falling back to around 250,000.

- 4.4 Reporting the Methodist community requires laying the extant, statistically-sound 'people measure' (membership) alongside the attendance measures for both church services and other activities, with further work in progress to refine Standardised Weekly Attendance. As the relationship between these various measures is not necessarily straightforward, care will be needed to prevent over-simplistic assessment. It is envisaged that the statistics are used, not mechanistically, but to promote evidence-based 'pastoral conversation' in fora charged with shaping the church's practical missional and ministerial response.
- 4.5 To assist this process, tools have been developed to map the various communities to which the statistics relate. The advanced version of the Methodist webmap, recently re-launched in a new edition, should be seen as complementary to this report but also as a permanent, standing resource for church leaders and planners. The webmap will be populated with geospatial data and live data from the Connexional Team database, which can be refreshed and updated between subsequent editions of the triennial statistics report. Local demographic, deprivation and administrative data can also be displayed, as required.

*****RESOLUTION**

42/1. The Conference received the Report.

Appendix 1: District Summary Tables

A. Membership movement 2013 to 2016

	District	2013	New Members	Net Transfers	Ceased to Meet	Deaths	2016	Decline		
								%	Recruitment	Retention
1	Synod Cymru	1,368	+ 24	- 16	- 129	- 125	1,122	17.98	101	145
2	Wales Synod	7,190	+ 256	+ 106	- 314	- 739	6,499	9.61	483	208
5	Birmingham	8,309	+ 295	+ 171	- 316	- 761	7,698	7.35	466	145
6	Bolton and Rochdale	5,292	+ 209	+ 5	- 309	- 447	4,750	10.24	238	304
7	Bristol	7,976	+ 242	+ 117	- 348	- 787	7,200	9.73	545	231
9	Cumbria	3,392	+ 123	- 34	- 155	- 299	3,027	10.76	176	189
10	Channel Islands	1,190	+ 50	+ 7	- 61	- 78	1,108	6.89	28	54
11	Chester and Stoke-on-Trent	7,826	+ 296	+ 15	- 366	- 644	7,127	8.93	348	351
12	Cornwall	6,198	+ 243	0	- 286	- 618	5,537	10.66	375	286
13	Darlington	5,809	+ 148	+ 39	- 316	- 575	5,105	12.12	427	277
14	East Anglia	6,986	+ 305	+ 61	- 386	- 648	6,318	9.56	343	325
15	Isle of Man	960	+ 47	+ 13	- 21	- 76	923	3.85	29	8
16	Leeds	6,347	+ 173	+ 41	- 180	- 569	5,812	8.43	396	139
17	Lincolnshire	5,191	+ 156	+ 78	- 182	- 502	4,741	8.67	346	104
18	Liverpool	5,502	+ 228	+ 20	- 612	- 535	4,603	16.34	307	592
19	Manchester and Stockport	8,035	+ 245	+ 105	- 624	- 693	7,068	12.03	448	519
20	Newcastle upon Tyne	7,790	+ 213	+ 45	- 383	- 748	6,917	11.21	535	338
21	Lancashire	7,529	+ 312	+ 46	- 586	- 636	6,665	11.48	324	540
22	Nottingham and Derby	8,738	+ 323	+ 49	- 531	- 766	7,813	10.59	443	482
23	Northampton	10,576	+ 382	+ 109	- 514	- 944	9,609	9.14	562	405
24	Plymouth and Exeter	7,946	+ 308	- 68	- 371	- 768	7,047	11.31	460	439
25	Sheffield	6,933	+ 222	+ 102	- 407	- 643	6,207	10.47	421	305
26	Southampton	8,698	+ 298	+ 144	- 268	- 820	8,052	7.43	522	124
27	West Yorkshire	6,690	+ 149	+ 19	- 362	- 639	5,857	12.45	490	343

28	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	8,376	+ 243	+ 75	- 301	- 780	7,613	9.11	537	226
29	York and Hull	8,474	+ 199	+ 38	- 447	- 784	7,480	11.73	585	409
31	Scotland	2,208	+ 37	- 43	- 159	- 247	1,796	18.66	210	202
32	Shetland	197	+ 5	+ 4	- 2	- 19	185	6.09	14	-2
34	Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire	8,042	+ 266	+ 100	- 454	- 733	7,221	10.21	467	354
35	London	18,303	+ 932	+ 386	- 958	- 1,017	17,646	3.59	85	572
36	South East	10,503	+ 365	+ 97	- 405	- 908	9,652	8.10	543	308
	Connexion	208,738	+ 7,294	+ 1,667	- 10,753	- 18,548	188,398	9.74	11,254	9,086

B. Average Weekly Attendance 2016 (church services)

	District	2013	2016	% Decline	Age 20 and over	Age 13 to 19	Age 5 to 12	Age 0 to 5	% Age Under 20
1	Synod Cymru	830	730	12.05	690	10	30	10	6.85
2	Wales Synod	7,400	6,830	7.70	6,070	80	500	180	11.13
5	Birmingham	8,740	7,680	12.13	6,690	260	550	180	12.89
6	Bolton and Rochdale	5,370	4,500	16.20	3,730	140	460	170	17.11
7	Bristol	9,750	9,250	5.13	8,010	190	780	270	13.41
9	Cumbria	3,390	3,000	11.50	2,680	60	210	60	11.00
10	Channel Islands	1,260	1,210	3.97	1,020	20	120	50	15.70
11	Chester and Stoke-on-Trent	8,490	7,550	11.07	6,510	210	550	270	13.64
12	Cornwall	6,810	6,930	-1.76	6,040	170	370	360	12.99
13	Darlington	5,650	5,020	11.15	4,280	80	530	140	14.94
14	East Anglia	8,520	7,770	8.80	6,860	160	570	180	11.71
15	Isle of Man	1,120	860	23.21	780	10	60	20	10.47
16	Leeds	6,160	5,640	8.44	4,750	120	570	200	15.78
17	Lincolnshire	5,370	4,480	16.57	4,190	60	190	50	6.70
18	Liverpool	6,220	5,000	19.61	4,380	110	360	150	12.40
19	Manchester and Stockport	7,310	6,610	9.58	5,670	160	560	220	14.22
20	Newcastle upon Tyne	8,810	7,530	14.53	6,360	230	750	200	15.67
21	Lancashire	7,390	6,920	6.36	5,620	210	820	270	18.79
22	Nottingham and Derby	9,780	8,920	8.79	7,570	170	820	350	15.02
23	Northampton	11,750	10,930	6.98	9,340	270	910	410	14.55
24	Plymouth and Exeter	8,940	8,050	9.96	7,110	160	510	260	11.55
25	Sheffield	8,530	7,650	10.32	6,560	200	630	250	14.12
26	Southampton	10,580	9,460	10.59	8,270	230	660	310	12.68
27	West Yorkshire	6,400	5,820	9.06	5,180	100	400	130	10.82
28	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	9,840	8,250	16.16	7,130	170	790	160	13.58
29	York and Hull	9,370	8,480	9.50	7,310	180	770	230	13.92

31	Scotland	1,760	1,420	19.32	1,300	20	90	20	9.15
32	Shetland	290	280	3.45	230	20	30	10	21.43
34	Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire	10,150	8,620	15.07	7,060	280	950	320	17.98
35	London	16,640	16,460	1.08	13,570	750	1,510	630	17.56
36	South East	11,850	10,220	13.76	9,010	220	700	300	11.94
	Connexion	224,470	202,070	9.98	173,970	5,050	16,750	6,360	13.94

Note: Age breakdown figures in some rows may not sum to total because of rounding. Cornwall District figures show impact of seasonal mission activity.

C. Standardised Weekly Attendance 2016 (AGAPE Categories)

	District	Cafes, Pop- Ins and Shops	Children, Families and Young People	Clubs and Social	Faith Exploration and Discipleship	Prayer, Fellowship and Worship	Relieving Poverty, Homeless- ness and Exclusion	Support Groups	Visitor Facilities/ Heritage/ Community Hub	Total	AGAPE attendances per church service attendance
1	Synod Cymru	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	0.0
2	Wales Synod	6,940	4,660	1,790	1,300	1,590	380	1,590	360	18,610	2.5
5	Birmingham	3,900	7,770	3,220	2,660	1,840	3,780	1,220	630	25,020	2.9
6	Bolton and Rochdale	8,950	4,180	2,390	480	1,310	450	4,260	300	22,320	4.2
7	Bristol	8,010	7,220	3,300	800	3,070	280	1,880	230	24,790	2.5
9	Cumbria	500	2,520	1,330	300	600	70	90	210	5,620	1.7
10	Channel Islands	230	990	250	110	160	10	50	0	1,800	1.4
11	Chester and Stoke- on-Trent	5,600	4,990	3,130	590	1,610	180	1,560	70	17,730	2.1
12	Cornwall	3,460	3,790	2,810	720	1,720	50	920	2,100	15,570	2.3
13	Darlington	1,550	4,920	1,840	520	1,580	260	310	40	11,020	2.0
14	East Anglia	4,140	3,900	3,050	1,530	1,620	130	530	290	15,190	1.8
15	Isle of Man	160	560	150	20	200	0	180	70	1,340	1.2
16	Leeds	2,090	5,290	1,780	670	1,430	370	710	20	12,360	2.0
17	Lincolnshire	1,370	3,030	2,190	360	1,170	130	390	40	8,680	1.6
18	Liverpool	4,580	5,940	2,370	680	1,310	360	1,210	60	16,510	2.7
19	Manchester and Stockport	5,690	10,110	4,020	1,100	1,920	90	3,550	280	26,760	3.7
20	Newcastle upon Tyne	2,320	5,250	3,450	610	2,270	1,390	540	70	15,900	1.8
21	Lancashire	3,970	4,590	1,990	830	1,660	380	2,120	120	15,660	2.1
22	Nottingham and Derby	3,870	7,670	2,320	1,110	2,040	1,070	380	130	18,590	1.9
23	Northampton	3,880	8,060	3,270	810	2,780	570	1,570	120	21,060	1.8

24	Plymouth and Exeter	2,440	4,650	2,240	1,160	1,480	430	1,540	1,350	15,290	1.7
25	Sheffield	3,310	7,300	3,470	2,150	2,020	460	870	80	19,660	2.3
26	Southampton	3,890	8,540	4,460	1,070	2,460	410	1,820	50	22,700	2.1
27	West Yorkshire	4,340	6,560	2,270	570	1,240	150	780	100	16,010	2.5
28	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	1,710	5,860	3,060	950	2,060	1,880	1,120	170	16,810	1.7
29	York and Hull	5,140	5,300	2,420	1,130	1,530	250	610	190	16,570	1.8
31	Scotland	1,480	890	270	90	310	80	510	0	3,630	2.1
32	Shetland	100	60	30	0	40	0	0	10	240	0.8
34	Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire	3,530	11,610	2,810	770	2,470	910	2,930	1,620	26,650	2.6
35	London	11,370	15,650	4,060	1,580	3,050	2,730	1,170	440	40,050	2.4
36	South East	3,020	8,510	3,140	1,780	2,620	520	1,860	660	22,110	1.9
	Connexion	111,540	170,370	72,890	26,450	49,160	17,770	36,270	9,810	494,260	2.5

**D. Ministers, Local Preachers/Worship Leaders, Lay Employees, as at 31/10/16
Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals, year to 31/10/16**

	District	Circuit Ministers (Active)	Members per Minister	Local Preachers/Worship Leaders	Lay Employees (Full-time Equivalent)	of which Family/Community	Baptisms	of which Adult	Weddings	Funerals
1	Synod Cymru	6	*	21	0	0	9	1	7	46
2	Wales Synod	61	107	342	22	6	293	26	99	923
5	Birmingham	81	95	318	117	53	274	27	75	608
6	Bolton and Rochdale	30	158	174	24	11	203	18	29	398
7	Bristol	72	100	376	65	27	240	22	86	773
9	Cumbria	26	116	174	21	15	97	15	21	219
10	Channel Islands	12	*	43	13	4	26	0	13	104
11	Chester and Stoke-on-Trent	40	178	330	41	15	329	22	80	941
12	Cornwall	37	150	322	22	7	172	10	77	552
13	Darlington	41	125	232	32	8	415	13	83	663
14	East Anglia	60	105	346	45	20	234	17	99	675
15	Isle of Man	3	*	27	0	0	23	1	8	57
16	Leeds	50	116	194	45	13	226	11	57	490
17	Lincolnshire	33	144	242	10	3	159	4	36	474
18	Liverpool	42	110	161	44	17	282	10	47	452
19	Manchester and Stockport	64	110	271	69	36	283	32	71	610
20	Newcastle upon Tyne	59	117	299	55	19	549	25	109	885
21	Lancashire	50	133	298	27	12	194	13	60	537
22	Nottingham and Derby	62	126	443	53	27	252	21	70	760
23	Northampton	84	114	452	51	15	410	37	130	791
24	Plymouth and Exeter	54	131	354	59	29	152	28	65	549
25	Sheffield	51	122	347	55	23	529	34	108	711
26	Southampton	70	115	397	89	55	209	18	80	660

27	West Yorkshire	47	125	243	35	10	166	7	54	484
28	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	57	134	305	35	10	473	35	112	885
29	York and Hull	59	127	347	31	9	324	41	95	644
31	Scotland	20	90	90	18	5	18	2	10	172
32	Shetland	4	*	12	1	0	3	0	3	27
34	Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire	61	118	304	54	21	308	20	97	597
35	London	147	120	576	263	70	624	76	120	787
36	South East	79	122	404	81	32	300	29	110	660
	Connexion	1,562	121	8,430	1,478	570	7,776	615	2,111	17,134

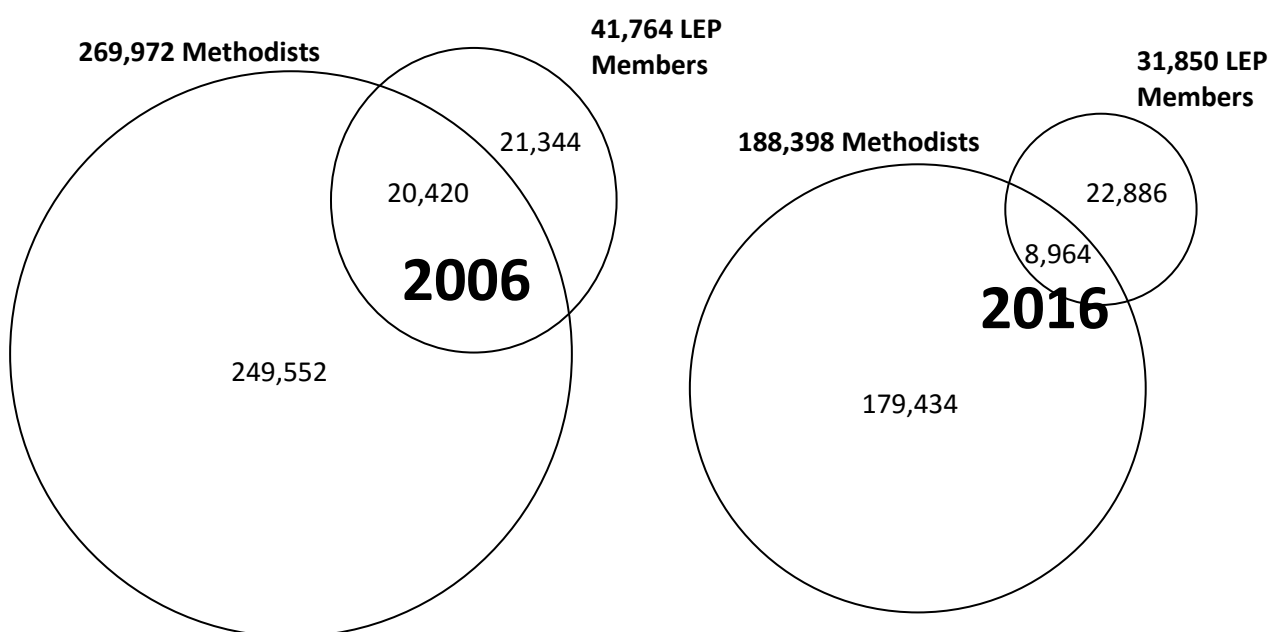
*Members per minister figure not shown for numerically small Methodist Districts.

Appendix 2: Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs)

The headline figure of 188,398 members as at 31 October 2016 includes 8,964 who were Methodists when their Local Church entered into a Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership (SCLEP) with one or more other denominations, or who were subsequently enrolled as members in the Methodist church forming the partnership. Increasingly, however, SCLEPs have tended neither to assign the names of newly enrolled members to any of their founding church communities, nor to apportion numbers of such new members to their respective denominations, according to some pre-agreed formula. With some SCLEPs over forty years old, the practice now tends to be to enrol new members as 'joint', and in some cases to re-enrol founder members under a joint or equivalent category. Denominational branding has been further diluted by the original denominational communities often being incorporated under a new name when the partnership was formed.

Statistics for Mission now only reports two categories of membership for SCLEPs, viz (i) those of identifiably Methodist heritage, and (ii) all others, comprising those of other denominational heritage, as well as the joint or 'ecumenical' categories. There were 22,886 other such members as at 31 October 2016. They help make up the Methodist community, insofar as they are integral to a single church congregation that is represented in a Methodist Circuit, or in a Local Ecumenical Area with Methodist participation. But they may not necessarily see themselves as Methodist, particularly where the ecumenical character of the church has been longstanding or especially pronounced, or where the church building, service activity or ministerial provision strongly reflects another denominational tradition. On the other hand, there are others in this category who, because of the strongly continuing characteristics of the Methodist church entering into the partnership, would not see themselves as any different from 'ordinary' Methodists. Further investigation is needed in this area, which researchers from the Methodist Church, the Church of England and the United Reformed Church have agreed could be undertaken collaboratively, if the necessary approvals and resources were made available.

Figure 3: Methodist membership and Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships



Over time, as proportionately more newer members become joint or ecumenical, the 'identifiably Methodist' component of SCLEP membership has declined both in relative and absolute terms. This is illustrated in Figure 3. Whereas ten years ago just under half the members of SCLEPs with Methodist involvement were identifiably of Methodist heritage, by 2016 that proportion had fallen to 28 per cent. The SCLEP component of the broader Methodist community has, however, slightly increased in relative (though not in actual) terms. In 2016, 15 per cent of members in churches represented in a Methodist Circuit, or in a Local Ecumenical Area with Methodist participation, belonged to Single Congregation LEPs, compared with 14 per cent in 2006.

By definition, attendance at Single Congregation LEPs cannot be analysed out into separate denominational categories. Average Weekly Attendance at the 463 SCLEP churches where Methodists were involved account for 29,500 of the 202,100 attendances (14.6 per cent) noted at paragraph 2.12 of this Report.