

16. Developments in Reaffirming *Our Calling*

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Resolution	16/1. The Conference receives the Report.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	Following agreement that the reaffirmation of <i>Our Calling</i> would be the primary strategic driver for the whole Church, this report celebrates some of the ways in which this reaffirmation has shaped the life and work of the Methodist Church during the 2018/2019 connexional year.
Main points	Section A – Introduction Section B – Evangelism Section C – Worship Section D – Learning and Caring Section E – Service Section F – The Next Steps
Background context and relevant documents	‘Reaffirming <i>Our Calling</i> : the future call of the Methodist Church’ – Discussion paper presented to the 2018 Conference Connexional Property and Financial Strategies (adopted October 2018) MC/18/72 – Methodist Council Objectives MC/18/76 – Concordat 50 th Anniversary Celebrations MC/19/12 – <i>Our Calling</i> – Developing Vocation MC/19/29 – Report from the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) MC/19/36 – Priorities for Mission in Britain Grants MC/19/43 – Council Objectives

SECTION A INTRODUCTION

1. The 2018 Conference considered a discussion paper entitled ‘Reaffirming *Our Calling*: the future call of the Methodist Church’. Rather than simply sitting alongside the many other items of business before the Conference, this paper served to bring to the fore overarching questions about the state of the work of God and the shape of the continuing participation of the Methodist Church in God’s mission. It followed conversations at the Connexional Leaders’ Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Council, which in turn sought to respond to the challenges presented by the triennial statistical returns to the 2017 Conference.
2. The discussion paper noted that the culmination of the reflections of the CLF and Council was to agree that the reaffirmation of the statement *Our Calling* would be the primary strategic driver for the whole Church. This statement, first adopted in 2000, affirms that:

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

The Church exists to:

- *Increase the awareness of God’s presence and celebrate God’s love (Worship)*
- *Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care (Learning and Caring)*
- *Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice (Service)*

- *Make more followers of Jesus Christ (Evangelism)*
(Our Calling Conference Report 2000)

3. Over the course of 2018/2019, the connexional reaffirmation and renewal of *Our Calling* has enabled a significant number of developments in the life of the Church – developments that offer inspiration, hope, a sense of purpose and clarity of direction. While some of these developments involve the work and structure of the Connexional Team, the purpose of the Team is always to resource Local Churches, Circuits and Districts, where the life and witness of the Methodist Church is experienced and made a reality.
4. In October 2018, the Council adopted its tasks, aims and priorities¹ (the ‘Objectives’) for the period ahead, structured around *Our Calling* (see MC/18/72). MC/19/43 provides a detailed update on progress in these areas. Across the Connexion, Local Churches, Circuits and Districts have devoted time, energy and resources to the reaffirmation of *Our Calling*, expressed in countless ways. This report celebrates a small sample of developments that have taken place across the Connexion and offers an update on the ways in which the Methodist Church is seeking to respond continually to the gospel of God’s love in Christ.
5. Of the four headings of *Our Calling*, this report will address ‘Evangelism’ first, in keeping with the discussion paper considered by the 2018 Conference. That paper identified ‘priority areas’ agreed by the CLF and the Council for focus in the context of responding to and reaffirming *Our Calling*, the first of which was “To make more followers of Jesus Christ through mission and evangelism” (para. 11). In direct response to this, resources have been dedicated to this hugely important area of work, and a number of exciting developments are outlined below.

SECTION B EVANGELISM



6. In order to make more followers of Jesus Christ across the Connexion, the Council understands its task as being:
 - a. to equip and give confidence to the Methodist people to share the gospel of Christ with those in our local communities so as to lead people to making a personal commitment to Christ; and
 - b. to be celebrating and playing a full part in the global community of Methodists (eg the World Methodist Council and the European Methodist Council) for the sake of the transformation of the world through the sharing of the gospel, and being a confident Church acting prophetically in our own Connexion with ecumenical and other partners.
7. Since the 2018 Conference, a new ‘Evangelism and Growth’ team has been appointed within the Connexional Team, with 10 officeholders across the Connexion working hard, in concert with Connexional Team, regional and district leaders, to progress the emerging Evangelism and Growth strategy. At the time of writing, the Director of Evangelism and Growth is on target to complete 50 on-the-road consultations by the end of April and will continue conversations around the developing strategic plan at the Conference, next autumn with various committees, and in October with a connexional ‘Consultation and Celebration of Evangelism and Growth’ in London. A taster video about the (re)start of this focus was launched in early March, in time for Presbyteral and Representative Spring Synods. These extensive consultations, as well as contributing to the development of a connexional strategy, have served to energise, equip and empower Methodists across the Connexion for

¹ It is worth noting that in order to focus more coherently on *Our Calling*, and to pay attention to today’s contexts, the ‘Priorities for the Methodist Church’ adopted in 2004 will no longer form part of the framework for action.

the task of 'making more followers of Jesus Christ.' The following are some quotations from those who have attended:

"As a young person, I am so excited that the Methodist Church wants to plant new churches to reach people who haven't felt interested in God before."

"When I hear about this emerging strategy, it reminds me why I signed up to be a minister in the first place. Ministry is challenging, but I continue to choose hope, in part because the Methodist Church is focusing on the most important things."

"I feel freed to focus on the things God cares about the most!"

8. One of the key ways in which Methodists will be equipped to talk more confidently of God and to 'make more followers of Jesus Christ' will be through a renewed focus on testimony, drawing on a key Methodist charism.
9. The reaffirmation of *Our Calling* has manifested itself in many areas of the Church's work as we continue to be part of God's story. In preparation for the 2019/2020 Year of Testimony, every Circuit has received a copy of the Talking Jesus resource and it was translated into Welsh for use by Synod Cymru.
10. There are many exciting initiatives planned that will provide the Methodist Church with resources and confidence to share and hear stories of faith. The theme of testimony was suggested at 3Generate in 2017 and builds on the '1,000 Letters' campaign. This is echoed by the Revd Dr Barbara Glasson and Prof Clive Marsh who will release their book *So what's the story?* in time for the 2019 Conference. Their book looks at how we can better understand other people's stories and express our own. Every one of us has compelling stories to tell of our journey to faith and how God is with us in our day-to-day life.
11. As part of the Year of Testimony, the Evangelism and Growth team is working on *The Story Project*, through which everyone will have the chance to share the story of their walk with God. These will be honest accounts of how God has been with us (or even absent) in our celebrations and struggles, joy and pain. During the 2019/2020 connexional year, the Methodist Church will seek to put God's and our story at the heart of our lives, enriching and equipping us to share our faith with everyone.
12. Vital conversations have been held with senior representatives of Methodist charities and bodies including Action for Children, MHA, Central Finance Board and All We Can to affirm a shared hope in God's world and to develop shared ways of working in the mission of the Church.
13. The celebration of our role in the global community of Methodists for the sake of sharing the gospel continues to develop, eg through an increased focus on twinning and P2P (people-to-people) programmes and through the engagement of young Methodists on World Church exposure visits. Building on the celebrations in August 2018 of the 50th anniversary of the Concordat between the United Methodist Church and the Methodist Church in Britain (see MC/18/76), the Council in October endorsed a draft statement reaffirming our shared heritage as Wesleyan Christians and appointed (with the Council of Bishops) a group to take forward work on seven key areas, with a view to presenting a renewed Concordat to both Conferences in 2020.

SECTION C WORSHIP



- 14.** In order to increase the awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love across the Connexion, the Council understands its task as being:
- a. to consider how best to enable every act of worship conducted in the name of the Methodist Church to give honour to God through excellence, creativity, prayerful contemplation and encompassing a variety of spiritualities; and
 - b. to have a clear articulation of the Church's engagement with God's mission and therefore to ensure there are ministers, local preachers and lay leaders of the required gifts and qualities for that mission and that they are effectively deployed. Enabling all people to discern and utilise their gifts in responding to *Our Calling*.
- 15.** Over the past year, a great deal of work has been undertaken to resource those responsible for leading God's people in prayer and worship, eg through continuing improvements to *Worship: Leading and Preaching (W:LP)* and the development of guidelines for peer-to-peer mentoring (see MC/19/43).
- 16.** One of the most significant developments in this area of *Our Calling* has been the emergence of a connexional vocations strategy (see MC/19/12). Changes to practice and policy have been proposed in order to achieve a 'culture change' in the life of the Methodist Church, such that conversations about call, discernment and vocation (to ministry in its broadest sense, lay and ordained, in the Church and in the world) might become part of our everyday language.
- 17.** A Vocations Development Working Group has been appointed, with a focus on a coordinated approach to vocational development across the Connexional Team, and is now in the very early stages of its task. Work is also underway to support and develop roles that will act as a focus for vocational exploration on a more local, district or regional basis, and to link together and publicise the many existing discipleship and vocation resources. Some of the fruits of this area of work that have already been seen include:
- a. 'Exploring Ordained Ministry' days held at Cliff College and in London with over 80 people in attendance. Further days are envisaged for those aged 18-30 and those from BAME communities.
 - b. A wide range of opportunities for vocational exploration for young people, including (but not limited to):
 - i. ONE Opportunity – pilots are now running across the Connexion, offering young people aged 16-23 a part-time paid role for one year to enable them to participate in and develop a project within the Local Church or Circuit;
 - ii. ONE Programme – ONE Programme Participants (OPPs) are employed for one year on a part-time basis with a local project to help develop the mission and ministry of the Church at a local, regional and connexional level;
 - iii. The Methodist Intern scheme, now in its second year, continues to develop, providing exciting opportunities for young adults aged 21-26 to spend a year exploring faith alongside a paid placement with a range of professional organisations, combining training and mentoring with professional, personal and spiritual development;
 - iv. Rise and Shine – a vocations-focused weekend for young leaders aged 16-23;
 - v. Young Preachers and Worship Leaders – a new event in partnership with Cliff College enabling young people interested in preaching or worship-leading to gather and explore vocation together.

SECTION D LEARNING AND CARING



18. In order to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care, across the Connexion, the Council understands its task as being:
- a. to use the resources of the Church to support Districts, Circuits and Local Churches to be most effective in their mission, by providing cost-effective connexional specialist services and relevant local based resources; and
 - b. to operate the oversight/leadership functions of the Methodist Church as effectively as possible in pursuit of the Church's mission ensuring the most appropriate use of resources.
19. Over the past year, Circuits and Districts (many of which were already actively engaged in shaping their common life around *Our Calling*) have invested considerable time and energy in the further development of Mission Plans. Local Churches, Circuits and Districts and their leadership teams have been seeking to develop their church and circuit vision plans, with regional teams offering assistance in facilitating vision and strategy days as these plans evolve.
20. In March 2019, the CLF considered Mission Plans from a number of Districts. As just one example, the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District's Mission Statement and Plan (revised in October 2018) begins with *Our Calling* as its starting point, before indicating the breadth of work taking place in the District, the rate of change over recent years, and the values that underpin the District's work. The Mission Plan does not offer a comprehensive list of the District's activities, but brings to the fore important emphases for the coming connexional year and new areas of work. It is audited by each meeting of the District Policy Committee, and has proven helpful in providing a clear focus for the DPC's meetings.
21. Applications were invited from Districts for funding towards projects responding specifically to the reaffirmation of *Our Calling*. Nine district projects were funded at a cost of £882,000, with the Districts providing matched funding. A further £600,000 was then released from the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) for further district applications (see MC/19/29). The projects supported in this way across the Connexion are as follows:
- a. A presbyter to work with ecumenical colleagues to create a pioneering church community on a new housing development in the Wales Synod;
 - b. A Mission Advisor in the Birmingham District;
 - c. Developments in the New Room as a centre for learning about Methodism, a venue for community groups and a hub for outreach in the Bristol District;
 - d. A Youth Work Enabler in the Cumbria District;
 - e. An Evangelism and Mission Support post in the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District;
 - f. A District Mission, Evangelism and Community Engagement Enabler in the Darlington District;
 - g. A 'Replanting Rural' scheme in the East Anglia District, through which Local Churches can offer their buildings for new church plants and pioneer projects;
 - h. 'The Neighbourhood Project' in the Liverpool District – a team of mission enablers working closely with a church to develop its understanding and practice of being 'a good neighbour';
 - i. A Church Planting Officer in the Manchester and Stockport District;
 - j. A District Community Engagement Enabler in the Newcastle upon Tyne District;
 - k. A Godly Play bus in the Lancashire District;
 - l. A Wellbeing Officer and a Young Evangelists and Pioneers scheme in the Nottingham and Derby District, equipping young people to start new Christian communities;

- m. 'Overstone Project' (Methodist school) Community Chaplain in the Northampton District;
 - n. Equipping 'Christian Communities in Conversation' in the Plymouth and Exeter District;
 - o. A Mission Development Support Worker in the Sheffield District;
 - p. A Missional Communities Worker and support for 'Resourcing Churches' (focusing on missional initiatives such as church planting) in the Yorkshire West District;
 - q. A District Ministry and Mission Coordinator in the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District;
 - r. A District Pioneer Nursery in the Yorkshire North and East District;
 - s. A District Discipleship Enabler in the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District; and
 - t. A Housing Development Officer in the South East District.
- 22.** Further support continues to be available through the provision of connexional grants. The four headings of *Our Calling* have previously set an overall strategic context for grant-making, but it was agreed that more specific priorities and criteria were needed to ensure the best and most focused use of the Church's resources. Following a thorough review, a new set of criteria for Mission in Britain grants was presented to the April 2019 Council, emphasising (for instance) the need for work to relate clearly to the Circuit and District's Mission Plans (see MC/19/36).
- 23.** In October 2018, the Council adopted a Connexional Property Strategy and a Connexional Financial Strategy to ensure the best use of the Church's resources and the gifts of connexionalism in the fulfilment of *Our Calling*. An event in May 2019 will gather together officeholders from across the Connexion with responsibility for implementing these strategies for a day of inspiration, resourcing and the sharing of expertise.
- 24.** The CLF and the Council have engaged in fruitful conversations around oversight and trusteeship, considering structures with the aim of providing greater support; enabling ministry, mission and broader strategic thinking; and promoting better coordination. Questions were considered including: What can most effectively be provided by Circuits, Districts or the Connexional Team? What of our structures and patterns of oversight do we need to keep or lay aside, and why? This conversation will continue at the 2019 Conference as similar questions are asked with a view to ensuring that Methodist oversight structures are as effective and supportive as possible.
- 25.** In light of the need to structure the Connexional Team to best support the connexional reaffirmation of *Our Calling*, the Senior Management Group (SMG) and the SRC have agreed to move away from the existing understanding of the Team as being made up of a number of 'Clusters' and to increase cooperation through the development of one Team organised into a number of key areas: Mission, Ministry, Finance & Resources, HR & Development, Communications and the Conference Office. The SRC and SMG believe this will help the Team to become less a group of Clusters and more a close-knit cohesive Team supporting the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church through the reaffirmation of *Our Calling*.
- 26.** Work continues on the development of a 'Methodist Way of Life' (see 'Reaffirming *Our Calling*: the future call of the Methodist Church' paras. 16-21) designed to encourage a change in culture and to enable faithful attention to the activity of God in the heart and in the world. A wide range of resources is being designed that will comprise much more than a membership programme or curriculum for small groups, but rather a pathway for whole-life discipleship drawing on Methodism's rootedness in tradition and relevance in the 21st century.

SECTION E SERVICE



27. In order to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice across the Connexion, the Council understands its task as being:
- to be an inclusive and diverse Church by extending our reach and engagement with those who feel marginalised, ensuring that all feel protected to be able to participate; and
 - to resource work and programmes which then transform our society and communities to embody the kingdom of God through living out our social holiness; offering loving acts of justice and service to all and challenging injustice wherever we see it.
28. Over the past year, the Methodist Church has worked ecumenically through the Joint Public Issues Team in order to identify areas where the Church might challenge injustice and seek to be a prophetic voice, including the promotion of:
- a society that welcomes the stranger;
 - a society where those who are the poorest are at the centre;
 - a society that values each generation;
 - a world that shares a single planet fairly;
 - a world that works for global peace; and
 - a society where there is greater democratic participation.

Key campaigns this year designed to give expression to this challenge have included: Living Lent, the hostile/welcoming environment, terrorism, Universal Credit and inter-generational justice.

29. As just one example of the impact of these campaigns, over 450 people engaged with the 'Living Lent' campaign through social media and daily emails, with many others taking part through their Local Churches. The resources provided equipped Methodists to engage with every facet of *Our Calling*, through:
- Worship*: the provision of theological and devotional material for individuals and groups enabled people to explore the theological principles underpinning climate justice;
 - Learning and Caring*: the growth of a 'Living Lent' community (online and in Local Churches, schools and community groups) and the provision of blogs and other materials exploring policy and systemic issues enabled reflection on the ways in which climate justice involves being good neighbours to our local and global family, especially the most vulnerable;
 - Service*: 'calls to action' led to involvement with campaigns such as Christian Aid's Big Shift, ECCR Local Plastic Waste, Eco Church, Eco Congregation and the new Eco Circuit and Eco District schemes; and
 - Evangelism*: the 'Living Lent' campaign encouraged Methodists to speak into the wider dialogue on climate action and to share the Church's hope in God's future.

SECTION F THE NEXT STEPS

30. The reaffirmation of *Our Calling* has, over the past year, provided a unity and clarity of purpose for the life and mission of the Methodist Church that many have found exciting and energising. It has helped to clarify and confirm our shared identity as the people called

Methodists, united by the gospel of God's love in Christ, and our task in responding to this love. Of course, the developments highlighted in this report represent just a small portion of the ways in which Local Churches, Circuits and Districts across the Connexion are seeking to respond.

31. As the people called Methodist seek to be ever-more faithful in the tasks to which we are called, the work of paying careful and prayerful attention to the state of the work of God continues. The Council (and other bodies in the life of the Church) will continue to view its work through the lens of *Our Calling* and to discern its tasks, aims and priorities accordingly. The 2019 Conference, as it makes important decisions about the priorities of the Church and the use of its resources, will no doubt find that *Our Calling* provides helpful foundations on which to build.
32. The discussion paper considered by the 2018 Conference closed with these words – words that, a year later, remind us once again of the importance of our mutuality and interdependence as we move into the future, our calling to fulfil.

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.*

*He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.*

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

*****RESOLUTION**

16/1. The Conference received the Report.