

## Ministry and Mission in the City Centre

1. 'City' is a difficult term to deal with: it can be defined formally in several ways. So, with a measure of informality, this paper uses the word 'city' to cover what may be thought of locally as cities or large towns. More particularly, the focus is on the city centre (where again the phrase should be considered a piece of shorthand for the central area of large towns as well as urban communities formally designated as cities).

What is distinctive about **city centres**?

*A The dominant features of the environment are commercial, retail, civic, leisure, judicial and educational institutions.*

*B There may or may not be residential accommodation.*

*C The population is transient, with extremes of power and powerlessness, wealth and poverty.*

People in each metropolitan area, city or large town are the best judges of where the city centre is, and its extent.

2. In every city centre there are opportunities and demands, all of the utmost importance to the Methodist Church's mission in British society. Each city centre is a unique meeting place of extreme need and astonishing prosperity, a place where far reaching decisions are taken which affect the wellbeing of the whole city and its surrounding area. Institutions of many kinds focus their work and negotiate their status in society from within the city centre. Thousands of people work in the city centre and many more take their leisure there. A growing number are returning to live there. The city centre is often the focus of both civic pride and urban squalor, which typically exist side by side.

*It is not always easy to make hard and fast distinctions between, say, city centre and inner city contexts; and significant social change is affecting both.*

*The distinctive character of the **inner city** may be hinted at in the following.*

*A Multiple deprivation - high scores for unemployment rates, homelessness, dependency on public benefits and levels of crime; poor standards of public transport coupled with a low rate of car ownership; few, small and expensive shops, and low scores in environmental indices.*

*B Lack of human resources in the area - healthcare, educational, financial and other professional personnel; political and community leadership.*

*C A strong sense of 'place': near the centre of a city but not quite part of it. Primarily a residential community, but one in which many people feel trapped. Frequently many cultures live cheek by jowl in the inner city, though sometimes there is a single deprived cultural group. Massive dislocation has often*

*been part of the experience, as inadequate housing stock has been replaced with alternative accommodation in large-scale redevelopment projects.*

3. In the connexional statistical returns, 112 Methodist churches or projects are identified locally as 'city centre'. This compares with 'inner city' (406), 'urban housing estate' (386) and 'suburban/neighbourhood' (1329). [Most of our churches are in village or rural contexts (3051) or in small towns (1098)].

4. Historically a much smaller number of churches and projects have been placed on an official 'city centre list'. The criteria are set out in SO 440(1): 'A city centre church or project...in a conurbation of over 250,000 people or a city which exercises a role as a regional centre'. (The word 'regional' is here used informally and not in the contemporary sense of, eg, the nine English regions, eight of which have regional government offices and regional development agencies, with the Greater London Authority and the elected mayor of London having special powers). A decision to place a church or project on the official list may be made by a district synod, in consultation with the Home Mission Division (up to 1996) and in principle nowadays with the Methodist Council. Churches on this list are treated in special ways on certain matters. The details are to be found in Standing Orders 352, 440, 540(5), 541, 944 and 970(2.ii).

5. A subordinate reason for this paper arises from the duty laid on the connexional Team to review the official city centre list. The complex relationship between churches which identify themselves in the statistical returns as 'city centre' (paragraph 3) and those on the official city centre list (paragraph 4), together with some confusion about who is or should be on the official city list, has led to the view that the standing orders need revision. At the conclusion of this paper there are suggestions of how the Standing Orders might be revised to relate better to local perceptions of what counts as a city centre church or project. More importantly the aim of this paper is to set these administrative matters within clear value judgements about Christian work and witness in city centres and a policy for the Methodist Church's contribution in city centres (paragraphs 10-11).

6. Methodist resources in city centres vary immensely in size and nature from place to place. The resources may take the form of buildings, reserves of money, rents from lettings, ministers, deacons, employed staff, volunteers, worshipping congregations, social care projects, community facilities or partnerships with a wide range of organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

7. In spite of the great differences of context and resource, there is a measure of commonality about city centre work. People involved in it, though from very different situations, are able to support and learn from one another. The Methodist City Centre Group (MCCG) is a network of people so involved from all parts of the connexion. Its convenor is currently the Rev Peter Willis (Nottingham Central Mission Circuit). Its aims are:

The advocacy of the role of city centre ministry.

The training and mutual support of those engaged in city centre ministry.

The discernment and encouragement of good practice in city centre ministry.

8. What is distinctive about city centre work? The MCCG has sketched the identity and the role of city centre ministry in the following terms.

#### **IDENTITY**

*A Often collaborative style of ministry, with or without a gathered congregation and with or without premises of its own. [Several of the premises in use are listed buildings].*

*B Working in partnership with other churches, groups and agencies who share Kingdom values.*

#### **ROLE**

*A To demonstrate the love of God as seen in Christ, for all who live, work and spend time in the city centre.*

*B To provide opportunities for varieties of worship for a transient people.*

*C To offer pastoral care and nurture for a scattered congregation, for members of other churches while they are in the city centre and for those who belong to no church at all.*

*D To fulfil a representative and prophetic role to civic, media, district and ecumenical authorities and structures on behalf of the wider Methodist Church.*

*E To offer support and affirmation for Christians in the work place.*

#### **TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES**

*A Responding to the changes in city centre life and embracing new and varied models of ministry, there is constant need for the city centre church to reflect, adapt and reshape itself.*

*B The city centre, with other areas, often bears the brunt of many injurious changes in society.*

*C The responsibility sometimes of being a flagship church and focus for the district, denomination and wider church.*

*D The explosion of the leisure industry and new patterns of Sunday life.*

*E The redevelopment of city centres and continual change of population.*

*F The demands of a seven-day, 24-hour city.*

*G The effective deployment of resources and personnel.*

9. This specialised ministry relevant to the city centre is complemented by other distinctive ministries throughout each city. For example: inner city work, suburban ministry, urban housing estate ministry, chaplaincies, work in multi-faith contexts, work in majority black congregations, social and community

work projects focusing on general or particular social needs (eg children, older people, members of ethnic minorities). There are areas of overlap between these. Each of these specialised forms of church and ministry is supported, challenged and enriched by networks which link them together across a city in prayerful mutuality.

## **10. What does the Methodist Church want to achieve in city centres?**

10.1 We want to sustain in city centre work the physical resources which are currently deployed there (buildings, people and money).

The world 'sustain' needs careful exposition. It is intended to communicate a flexible, positive and imaginative approach to the use of resources. City centres are never static. Redevelopment, changing the way buildings are used, shifts of power and influence, and a constant flux in the opportunities and needs experienced by people who live, work or play in city centres are the recurring themes. Church resources need to be released and used with equal fluidity.

It does not enhance our mission if our buildings, programmes and activities are left stranded and invariant while everything changes around us. So the world 'sustain' is not intended to communicate maintenance of something for its own sake, and certainly does not imply that the traditional deployment of resources should be protected at any cost.

Methodist resources in city centres, whether great or small, must never be wasted or allowed to diminish. Because of the critical and demanding nature of the mission in city centres (paragraphs 2 and 8), city centre resources, of any kind, must not be disbursed to other sorts of work outside the city centre. It is crucial that in the foreseeable future we do not become less involved in city centres than we are at present.

It goes almost without saying that if opportunities arise to increase the resources available for city centre work, they should be grasped with alacrity.

10.2 We want to make a distinctive contribution to the wellbeing of city centres, as part of a thoroughly ecumenical commitment.

When all the resources the Methodist Church deploys in city centres are accumulated, they are very scarce and limit greatly the responses that can be made to the needs and opportunities that present themselves. The Methodist Church cannot afford for these limited resources to duplicate what other churches are doing. We have no alternative (theologically or practically) but to work collaboratively with ecumenical partners. Each church and Christian tradition brings something unique to the city centre, which enriches the total ministry of the whole Church.

Teamwork is not only basic to the mutual relationships between denominations and Christian traditions in the city centre; it is also fundamental to the effective use of people in city centre ministry. Ministers, deacons and lay people, employed staff and volunteers, must work collaboratively, with ecumenical partners, utilising the strengths and compensating for the weaknesses of individuals, together creating a rich mosaic of committed, informed and skilful practitioners.

Partnerships with many groups and organisations are essential. If at all possible resources, expertise and insights should be harnessed in the interests of the city centre. The groups and organisations with which partnerships may be formed may come from the voluntary sector, from the public service sector (eg FE colleges, HE institutions, health care projects, social services, the police, benefits agencies, housing associations, etc) and from the business sector. Relationships of mutual benefit may include the provision of chaplaincy services from the churches to a range of institutions.

## **11. How shall the Methodist Church achieve its aims in city centres?**

11.1 We need a clear connexional policy, the outlines of which are provided in this paper, together with the following suggestions:

Each district, by resolution of the District Synod, to decide, no later than August 2002, which pieces of work are to count as official city centre churches or projects.

In coming to this decision, each Synod to work within the following guidelines drawn from this report:

Local perceptions of what counts as the 'centre' of a city or large town (see sections 1-2).

The ministry and mission conducted there (section 8).

The commitments identified in section 10.

The particular arrangements applicable to churches and projects on the official list (section 11 as a whole and the revised Standing Orders accompanying this report).

(The District Synod Secretary to communicate these decisions to the Secretary of the Connexional Property Committee and the Co-ordinating Secretary for Church & Society.)

The Standing Orders relating to city centres to be simplified and to continue to ensure that

assets cannot be disbursed, especially when property is sold, but must be restricted to city centre use;

no CAPF levy to be charged to city centre churches or projects;

appropriate care is taken when ministers or deacons are stationed, in order to recruit people with an aptitude to city centre work.

Proper orientation and induction training should be given

Encouragement and adequate resources are provided by the connexional Team to the MCCG, to facilitate mutual support, training, sharing of experience and good practice.

11.2 Clear local strategies for development are put in place, to include the following:

A regular and rigorous review (in the spirit of 'Our Calling') of the whole shape and context of city centre ministry, the ecumenical environment, the gifts and strengths of current staff, current partnerships and activities. 'Our Calling' recommends an annual review. In the rapidly changing environment of the city

centre, we encourage an especially thorough review every fifth year. Such a thorough review should also be mandatory prior to any significant redeployment of capital assets or significant change in staffing levels.

The local overseeing body should be responsible for the regular reviews of its city centre work (either church council, circuit meeting or specialised designated management group). Whenever there is a thorough review, others should be invited to participate, including:

District personnel with appropriate experience;

External consultancy with expertise in city centre ministry (appropriate personnel can be identified by consultation with the convenor of MCCG);

Ecumenical partners (directly or through assured consultation).

The following outcomes should be aimed for through the regular process of review:

A clear vision and strategy in each place of what the Methodist Church can contribute to the total wellbeing of a city centre, complementing the contributions from ecumenical partners (which will also be changing over a period of time).

A robust five year business plan, which should aim to release the city centre work from dependency on ongoing grant aid or the need for excessive overt fundraising. Indeed, the business plan should typically identify imaginative partnerships and entrepreneurial activities which look to achieve a return on expenditure in order to build up resources for future development.

A realistic and flexible use of staff and volunteers, with clear roles and lines of accountability.

## **RESOLUTIONS**

**4/1.** The Conference adopts the report on Ministry and Mission in the City Centre.

**4/2.** The Conference approves the guidelines in section 11.1 for use by the Synods in carrying out their functions under SO 440(1) and directs each Synod, in the connexional year 2001-2, to determine in the light of this report and of those guidelines in particular which churches and projects are to be placed on the official city centre list.

**4/3.** The Conference directs the local overseeing bodies of churches and projects on the official city centre list to review their work in cities and large towns in the light of this report and of section 11.2 in particular.

**4/4.** The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:

**440 City Centres** (1) A Synod may designate a church or project within the District (as a) *for inclusion on the official city centre or project list in accordance with guidelines approved from time to time by the Conference and shall notify the connexional Team of each church or project so designated. The Team*

**shall maintain the official list accordingly.** Delete the remainder of the existing clause (1) and clauses (2) to (5) [for the text of which, see below].

**(2) The Church Council of each church designated under clause (1) (or the Circuit Meeting if such a church is a single-church Circuit) shall consult with the district Policy Committee about the most effective way in which the interests of other Circuits in the city, the District and ecumenical partners may be involved in the work of the Church Council or Circuit Meeting, as appropriate.**

**(3) Each project designated under clause (1) shall be a mission or ministry project carried on by a Church Council, a Circuit Meeting or a Synod in furtherance of the purposes of the relevant body.**

**(4) The relevant Church Council, Circuit Meeting or Synod, after consultation with the district Policy Committee, shall appoint a management committee for each project designated under clause (1). The committee shall be large enough to encompass the interests of the Circuit or Circuits which cover the city, the District and ecumenical partners and to include a range of appropriate professional expertise, but small enough to be effective.**

**(5) Every five years the Synod shall carry out a review of the mission and ministry of each church or project designated under clause (1), in collaboration with the responsible Church Council, Circuit Meeting or management committee.**

(6) (a) It shall be a district purpose of any District in which capital money arises from the disposition of any property subject to Standing Order 944 to apply such capital money and its income in continuing the work of God in the relevant city centre, as directed by the Synod. Any such money is model trust property.

(b) The district Policy Committee shall in full consultation with the Circuit in which the property was located, (if still constituted as such with one or more remaining Local Churches), bring to the Synod proposals for the application of capital money and income.

(7) [Previously Standing Order 352(4)] Any decision to remove a city centre church or project from the official list shall be made by the Synod after consultation with the Methodist Council and notified to the connexional Team.

**(8) Where a Synod carries on a city centre project, the provisions of Standing Order 534 and Section 54 shall apply, as closely as circumstances allow, to invitations and appointments to serve in such a project as if it were a circuit appointment. The management committee appointed under clause (4) above shall exercise the functions of the Circuit Meeting and its invitation committee, and the management committee shall appoint two of its members to exercise the functions of the circuit stewards in relation to the invitation process and, where necessary, to inform the Chairman as to the desirability of curtailment under Standing Order 544.**

*[Deleted text reads as follows:*

**440 City Centres.** (1) ...if (i) it is in a conurbation of over 250,000 people or a city which exercises a role as a regional centre, and (ii) in the case of a project it is a mission or ministry project carried on by a Church

*Council or Circuit Meeting in furtherance of the purposes of the relevant Local Church or Circuit. Before such a designation is made the Synod shall consult with the Methodist Council. Where this power is exercised the Synod shall appoint a City Centre Committee for each such church or project. The Synod shall then notify the connexional Team that the church or project is to be included on the official list maintained under Standing Order 352(1).*

*(2) Although the constitution of a City Centre Committee so appointed may vary considerably from place to place it should adequately represent the interests of the church or project, its Circuit and other Circuits in the city and the District, and also those of the connexional Team in respect of church and society and property.*

*(3) Each such committee shall advise and assist in the management of the relevant project or church and of any other churches which depend on that church's support. Except as provided in clauses (4) and (5) below, the committee shall be the invitation committee for the Circuit.*

*(4) Where, in the opinion of the Methodist Council, a Circuit Meeting and its Invitation Committee are effectively fulfilling the above functions of a City Centre Committee the council may authorise the continuance of this practice.*

*(5) In the case of a city centre project on the official list or in the case of a city centre church on the list which is part of a larger Circuit of which it is not the head, the Circuit Meeting shall appoint an invitation committee in accordance with Standing Order 541. In the exercise of its functions the circuit committee shall consult with the connexional Team and take account of any prior agreement made between the Circuit, the District and the Team or its divisional predecessors concerning the city centre church or project.]*

**541 The Committee.** *(1) (Except where a City Centre Committee acts as the invitation committee for the Circuit t)The Circuit Meeting shall for any year in which any decision as to an invitation to a minister or deacon will arise appoint an Invitation Committee.*

### **Consequential changes**

*Delete Standing Order 352, clauses (1) to (3), and re-number clause (4) as 440(7).*

*[Deleted text reads as follows:*

**352 City Centre Churches and Projects.** *(1) The connexional Team shall maintain, review and publish an official list of designated city centre churches and projects. All such churches and projects must be within Standing Order 440(1) and each addition to the list requires a notification by the Synod under that Standing Order. Each entry shall identify (i) the relevant Local Church or (ii) the relevant project and the Church Council or Circuit Meeting carrying it on.*

*(2) Each Church Council or Circuit Meeting responsible for a church or project on the official list shall send an annual report (including the accounts and a property report for every property occupied) to the Synod, and to the member of the connexional Team responsible for urban mission.*

*(3) Audited statements of income and expenditure and balance sheets shall be made available in connection with any general appeal for funds on behalf of any such church or project.]*

540(5) ...kept under Standing Order (352(1)) **440(1)**...

944 ...kept under Standing Order (352(1)) **440(1)**...

**970(2)(vi)** ...kept under Standing Order (352(1)) **440(1)**