

34. Our Calling Conference Agenda 2000

INTRODUCTION

Conference 1999 received a report from the Methodist Council (Agenda pages 617-620) which summarised work done on this issue in the connexional year 1998/99. It agreed to the appointment of a Strategic Goals Planning Group to take the process forward. The Conference report noted that in the autumn of 1998 many individuals and churches, and some circuits, responded to an immediate invitation to participate in a process of identifying the Church's Strategic Goals. Every one of those responses has been carefully read.

1. **The outcomes we dream about in the group which has prepared the material**

The whole Church rediscovers a shared vision of what the Church is for.

In each local situation priorities come into focus, with imagination and energy released to achieve identified plans and targets.

Significant changes of culture take place – flexible and creative applications of the gospel to the Church's work in contemporary society; liberation from tired traditions and the Methodist obsession with procedures and rules ('CPD and all that').

A greater diversity of response to local situations is complemented by a strong sense of pulling together throughout the connexion in pursuit of our shared vision.

2. **Use of language**

This work started with talk of Strategic Goals. That was shorthand and not popular. We gladly leave it behind, in favour of more suggestive vocabulary: a vision of what the Church is for and where we are going.

3. **What's new?**

We have attempted only to crystallise what we all know about the Church in our heart of hearts. It would be nice to think we have expressed ourselves without too much jargon. We hope everyone can recognise the obvious links with people who have walked this path before us.

We put weight on the process we hope our material could trigger in every church. Local ownership of this process and its outcomes is everything. Courage to see what is important, to go for it and to leave behind what is secondary will make the difference. And it does not matter if another church nearby, inevitably in a different context, comes up with something different.

What we seek to facilitate is for every level of the Church – for the Conference, the Methodist Council, the connexional Team, districts and circuits as well as for the local churches. We are bound together by a single calling and a shared vision.

4. **How shall we get things moving?**

4.1 We want to make second nature among Methodists (and partners from other denominations who share our life at local level) the words which crystallise our vision of what the church is for.

The Church exists to

- **Increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's Love**
- **Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care**
- **Be a good neighbour to people in need and to question injustice**
- **Make more followers of Jesus Christ**

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To assist the memory, these words can be further condensed to read:

The Church is for

WORSHIP, LEARNING & CARING, SERVICE, EVANGELISM

- 4.2 We can help one another to absorb this shared vision in many ways. For example:
- Posters in churches and church halls.
 - Everyone on our Community Roll and everyone who is interested in the Methodist Church can have a bookmark or a small card with the words of our shared vision printed on it.
 - We can practise shaping the prayers of the Church within this framework week by week.
- 4.3 There will be a leaflet for every Methodist and for ecumenical friends. A provisional draft is included below. It has been drawn up to suggest a process, not to prescribe one. The questions under each main heading are indicative only. We do not pretend they are comprehensive, or perfectly worded. Our belief is that they are good enough to get the process underway. They can be adapted, edited or replaced by a church's own questions. The one exception, we suggest, is the final question in each section: "What are our plans and targets for...over the next year?"
- We believe a simple resource of this kind can trigger a serious review of priorities in each situation, an exploration of initiatives which might be taken locally and a better use of resources. Good ideas can be turned into specific plans and targets. Twelve months later each local church can see where it has got to, look again at its aims, its resources and its environment, and revise its plans. What happens is always in the hands of the local church. And so the process rolls on year by year.
- The strength of the process lies in the confidence we may feel that throughout the connexion we share a vision of what the church is for, and we all judge ourselves as we see fit against that vision.
- 4.4 To assist the process we are preparing a Leader's Pack. This will contain guidelines on how to use the leaflet locally and at circuit, district and connexional levels. It may also contain supplementary materials for those who wish to read them: about possible outcomes of the process if it becomes an annual part of the Church's life; about the core principles we need to hold on to as the process develops; and about the changes in society which require fresh understandings of Christian witness and mission.
- 4.5 We intend to inaugurate a training programme operating on a 'cascade down' system.
- 4.6 We shall need a monitoring process to review outcomes and to develop processes over, say, a five year period.
- 4.7 Some churches will want to develop a much more wide-ranging, thorough and systematic understanding of their environment and their own skills and resources. The connexional Team has already prepared a significant resource, provisionally entitled "Pilgrims Way", to meet such a need. It will be available from the Resourcing Mission Office in Manchester, who will also advise about people who can work with churches to put it into practice. Some ecumenical resources covering similar ground are also available, e.g. "Bridges of Hope" (CTE).
- 4.8 We anticipate that our own resources, all produced to show a family likeness to one another, will be available in January 2001.

5. **Prepared by:** Roger Dawe, Ermal Kirby, Peter White, Kate Woodhouse and David Deeks (convenor).

DRAFT LEAFLET:

THE METHODIST CHURCH

OUR CALLING

... TO FULFIL

What is the Church for and where are we going?

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

To fulfil our calling we need to develop plans of action at every level of the Church. We do this within a framework set by a shared vision.

The Church exists to:

- **increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love**
- **help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care**
- **be a good neighbour to people in need and to question injustice**
- **make more followers of Jesus Christ**

OUR VISION

The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love

- What helps us to centre our worship on God?
- Where and when do we feel the presence of God? How can these experiences enrich services of worship?
- What motivates us to study the Bible?
- What helps us to express awe and wonder, thankfulness and praise, and love towards God? How can we use resources from the worldwide Church?
- What would help our worship to make sense to people who come only occasionally?
- Can we improve the comfort and décor of our surroundings and the welcome for people with disabilities?
- Is our worship much the same all the time? Should we explore styles and traditions of worship from other denominations and other parts of the world?

What are our plans and targets for improving our worship over the next year?

The Church exists to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care

- What church activities help us most to deepen our faith in God?
- How effective are our small groups, in linking faith to everyday life?
- How do we learn about the challenges of Christian life today from churches elsewhere in Britain and the wider world?
- Are there peripheral activities we should stop, to make time for our training and learning needs?

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- What activities make it easy for others to join us? What links do we have with groups using our premises?
- What do we expect from our pastors? What do we expect from one another by way of support and care? Do we notice or care about those who drift away or leave?

What are our plans and targets for developing our life together over the next year?

OUR VISION

The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to question injustice

- How do we discover the needs in our community and respond to them?
- Who is involved in service to the community through charities or community groups? Are there opportunities for more of us to become involved? How do we give attention to the moral issues raised by daily work?
- Do we share with one another our concerns about things which do not seem right, or cause trouble in our community, or appear unjust?
- How do we relate to injustice in other parts of the world?
- Are we making the best use of our premises and our money for service to the community? Are we wasting resources? Are we spending our time and resources in ways which are consistent with our beliefs and values?
- How does the life of our community, and our involvement in it, feature in the prayers of the church?

What are our plans and targets for improving our community involvement over the next year?

The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ

- How do we develop friendly attitudes towards everyone we meet?
- Do we have a clear message? Are the words we use straightforward and meaningful to those outside the Church?
- What attracts others to the Christian faith? Are there initiatives we could take to present our convictions? Can we do this with Christians of other denominations? Where should the focus be – on church premises, or in the community?
- How can we learn about effective witness from Christians in other cultures?
- What can we do to make our premises more welcoming?
- Should we consider planting a new congregation in this locality?

What are our plans and targets for making more followers of Jesus Christ over the next year?

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 34/1.** The Conference endorses the vision of what the church is for, particularly as set out in 4.1.
- 34/2.** The Conference calls on churches, circuits, districts and connexional bodies to develop the process entitled “Our Calling to Fulfil” over the next few years.
- 34/3.** The Conference directs the Methodist Council annually to monitor outcomes and to authorise changes to facilitate the process at every level of the Church.