

Disciple All: A Connexional Team Mission For Discipleship 2010-2013**Basic Information**

Contact Name and Details	Mark Wakelin Secretary for Internal Relationships
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Information
Draft Resolution	
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper outlines the further developments in the discussion of Discipleship, for the information of Methodist Council.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper brings the Council up to date as to further developments in the discussion on the theme of Discipleship. • Outlined are eight intentional actions that will enable the team to support the wider church in being and making disciples in the Methodist tradition, and further work on identifying and assessing outcomes.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The Our Calling and Priorities statements of Methodist Conference are developed in the Discipleship motif. The group discussion in the September 2009 Council and previous papers to SRC, [SRC/09/49] and [SRC/09/57], on making strategic choices form a background to the discussion.
Consultations	Team members, leaders, managers and specialists; the Methodist Council; the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	
Faith and Order	
Financial	
Personnel	
Legal	
Wider Connexional	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	
Risk	

DISCIPLE ALL: A CONNEXIONAL TEAM MISSION FOR DISCIPLESHIP 2010-2013

Introduction

'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all people"'. Matthew 28: 18-19

1. Helping people be and become disciples of Jesus is an essential part of Christian mission. In fact, God has given this calling to all Christians, including to the Methodist Church.
2. The main task of the Methodist Church locally is discipleship. We can and should respond to the great commission in Matthew 28, to 'disciple all'. However, many local churches find the task daunting. Some Methodist communities need to grow in confidence, not only in how to make disciples but to recognise this as a contribution to bringing about the Kingdom of God.
3. God's love continues to call all people to follow Jesus, from the youngest to the oldest. The Methodist Church remains part of the way God does this. In fact, a thirst for being, becoming and making disciples within the Methodist Church is already in evidence from:
 - the overwhelmingly positive reception to *'Time to talk of God'*,
 - unprecedented sales of *'Called by Name'*,
 - over subscription on a recurring annual basis of the Methodist Cell Conference,
 - the Methodist Council's enthusiastic reception of Team Focus Project 1 – dealing with Speaking of God and faith, including nurturing discipleship.
 - the overwhelming support of the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Methodist Council to a discipleship emphases and strategy in September 2009.

A changing world

4. Both society and Church are continually changing. Some now even talk of a 'post-secular' society, where religion, both formally and informally expressed, has taken an increasingly predominant place - against all expectations. There is a 're-enchantment' with spirituality in general and the life of faith communities. In particular there is concern for values, ethics and purpose that comes sharply into focus as the wider community faces up to the challenges and complexities of modern life.
5. This is a 'God timely' moment for change. Our concern for discipleship is shaped by an awareness of the desperate need of the world and its people, and recognising the role of the Methodist Church in responding to this. This includes the needs of individuals seeking healing, forgiveness, purpose, belonging and abundant life, and fractured and disoriented communities seeking the peace that we believe Jesus Christ brings. It also means the planet itself on the brink of various disasters as the whole of the created order waits for God's people to act.

6. The Methodist Church must share in God's aching longing for the world as expressed in his self-sending in Jesus and, by that same loving grace, understanding that we are invited, indeed called, to play a part as his disciples.

Disciples in the Methodist tradition

7. Being a Christian disciple and knowing Jesus Christ as the wellspring of life means that as Methodists:
- We meet and continue to meet God in a life-changing way.
 - We are continually seeking to become the person God intends us to be, through discipleship and transformation.
 - We live well with others in ways that help everyone become who God created them to be.
 - We want to bring the world closer into God's Kingdom and lead others towards that through the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ – the living water.

'Jesus answered: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst". John 4: 13-14a

What is a Disciple of Christ?

A follower of the teaching and person of Jesus Christ.

8. Jesus' teaching is known through the reading of Scripture as held by and understood in the Church. Jesus is also known within the Church and the wider world as the risen one who through his death, resurrection and ascension animates and shapes our experience of life. Through God's Spirit Jesus is also known to people in a personal way through which individuals within the community of the Church begin to discover and discern the presence of Jesus Christ in their own lives.

The Distinctively Methodist understanding

9. Scripture, reason, experience and tradition have been a key part of the Methodist story of how we believe we know what God is like and what God wants for us. Our faith is *sensible* in both the meaning of 'we can sense it', 'can know can feel our sins forgiven' – we can have a personal experience and knowledge of Jesus. Also in the meaning that it is sensible - that it is grounded, coherent and resonates with our experience of life, while at the same time shaping our lives as a result of a sense of God's call to live to God's praise and glory. Though we rejoice in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we do not tend to elevate charismatic experience over and above thoughtful engagement with Scripture, or 'practical Christianity'. We are neither a 'priestly' denomination who accept ecclesial authority without question, nor a 'Pentecostal' denomination that lays final authority on particular experiences of God, or people with particular gifts. Methodists place scripture at the heart of their reasonable searching after God, believing that God, through the Holy Spirit, speaks to us to encourage, correct and guide.

A follower of Jesus growing in Christian maturity

10. This usually means an inner exploration, a discovering of 'self' as made by and loved by God, though sinful and aware of the need for holiness that God alone can bring. It is a journey of formation and transformation into the healed, restored and forgiven image of God. A person who is a disciple is someone on a life-long journey of becoming created in love, redeemed and saved by love, formed and healed in love, and destined to be loved with an everlasting love. God's grace to heal, forgive, restore and to call places our response as gratitude, in the light of what we have been given.
11. It is *life long* – the church is concerned with young children's discipleship to the 'last lap' discipleship and everything in between.
12. It is *whole life* - it is concerned with the individual's relationships, roles in secular society, personal morality, life style choices, vocational decisions. Indeed, there is no part of an individual's life that is not about their following of Jesus sometimes referred to as the "three 'Bs": believing, belonging, behaviour, which are all constantly evolving.

The Distinctively Methodist understanding

13. Methodism shares fully in all the above, but goes beyond a general assent to notions of maturity, growth in grace, personal and social holiness, to a major focus of Christian faith and discipleship. Themes of pressing on towards the mark, and the consequential and practical evidence of grace conquering sinful rebellion in human lives is core to Methodist piety. Full perfection takes place in the context of becoming the people we are meant to be – in Christ. Discipleship is for 'all' and not for a certain type and the process of formation is to not to render the 'all' into a uniformity of belief, practice, spirituality or behaviour.
14. Therefore Methodist discipleship is *to the uttermost* – there is no limit to the personal growth, healing and restoration to which we are called. God's grace is sufficient to meet a challenge that we are destined to be 'changed from glory into glory'. We are to be holy. There is no age limit for the challenge to formation as a disciple, and no limit to the extent of Christian healing and wholeness. We are called to 'full perfection in Christ'.

A follower of Jesus in relationship with others through Christ

15. The Christian community is both the teller of good news and is itself part of the good news. So is the Methodist Church. It is in community that we are formed into the people we are meant to be and part of who we are meant to be is people able to be in community with others. We are called to be with others on our journey of faith. Christian community is at the heart of the individual formation to be in full stature in Christ. Community is not shaped by human affinity or tolerance but is itself a gift and grace of God that it is our business to discover and enjoy. Relationships within the Church are thus made and shaped by Christ who mediates such relationships. 'Christ is our peace', and thus our community is one where individuality is transcended rather than obliterated, and in which we become truly ourselves in relationship to others.

The 'Distinctively' Methodist understanding

16. It is hugely significant that 'Methodism' was initially lived out through a commitment to 'classes' and 'bands' rather than, primarily, congregations. These groups were deliberately and intentionally designed to facilitate the making and nurturing of disciples. Worship and prayer seamlessly linked with accountability and mutual encouragement to encourage obedience and holiness. As part of this emphasis on discipleship, classes became places where those who would probably never make the journey to 'Church as it was' were able to encounter Christ and Christianity.
17. From this arises a profound emphasis in our Methodist story on 'all'. Not only in the theological sense of every person as the object of the universal scope of Christ's death, and thereby the proper recipient of saving grace. Yet, also manifesting itself in a willingness to move outwards from safe spaces of who we would like to be in community with, to people on the edge who some might consider beyond the saving grace of God. Whether consciously articulated or not, there has been an almost instinctive predisposition and concern for the poor and marginalised in Methodism. At its best this has never been 'merely' philanthropy or social improvement, but included, sensitively and clearly, a call to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, which itself involves a voluntary belonging to Christ's community of faith.

Sharing in God's mission to redeem 'all things in Christ' and bring in the Kingdom of God

18. We understand all things to have been made by God and are thus made good. We also see the brokenness and subsequent incompleteness of creation - God's creative and saving work bound up in human free will. It is the free will of humanity which can realise the possibility of the greatest good, the freely offered love of a creature to their creator. It also creates the possibility for brokenness and suffering in the world. God's way is often one of partnership and covenant. The same creative choice to allow humanity the free will to reject is offered to allow humanity to accept and share in the work of healing the whole of creation. In this we understand creation to involve not only individuals but human society, not only human society but creation itself. All things are worked together for good.

The Distinctively Methodist understanding

19. Holiness is a distinctively Methodist perspective on the call to both individual discipleship and to 'social holiness'. To be 'holy' is to reflect more accurately the inherent nature of human shaping. We are made in the image of God, and only God is holy. It is in the restoration of that image in the process of discipleship that we begin to reveal what was and is always God's intention for us. This formation is always to be understood in terms of the community. God's holiness is a relational holiness, for God is in three persons. Our holiness is never other than 'social holiness', thus our call is to Christian community and not just personal piety. God's relational holiness is concerned with others and not just self, and so the community of God is concerned with the work of creation and redemption - both in terms of a world called to be holy and creation that 'cries out that it is made'.

20. It is often said that Methodism has a 'missionary ecclesiology', meaning that discipleship is deep rooted in the *raison d'être* of Methodism. Likewise the understanding of the role and nature of the Holy Spirit is missional, leading to the view that the Spirit is essentially a Spirit of mission, rather than merely a Spirit of blessing to the Church. Being Methodist has therefore always been about engagement, restoration and transformation, rather than disengagement, withdrawal and separation. Disciples of Christ engage the world in culturally resonant and counter cultural ways, as obedience to Christ demands. They seek to offer Christ in word and deed. They live on a large map, as their view of the actions of God – Father Son and Spirit – impels them.

The role of the Connexional Team

Aim

21. The aim of the Connexional Team's discipleship mission is to:
enable the making of effective, purposeful and intentional Team decisions that supports the wider Church in being and making disciples in the Methodist tradition.
22. It enables us to identify what we can 'uniquely or best' do to support and resource the Methodist Church regionally and locally in its discipleship task. It also builds upon our work to date and is set within the context of 'Our Calling' and the 'Priorities' of the Methodist Church.
23. The Connexional Team seeks to be 'in step' with the aspirations of the Methodist Church to be and to make disciples that ultimately contribute to bringing about God's Kingdom. The discipleship mission will enable us, together with all Methodist Council employees, to be effective in supporting this, while being good stewards of the people, practical and financial resources available.

Intentional action

24. The focus of the discipleship mission is to enable the Connexional Team to fulfil several intentional actions, or objectives, in the next five years. The practical work of the Team will be focused on activities that deliver these actions. We will develop identify and prioritise our work, year on year, based on the contribution it can make to delivering these actions by 2013.

They are:

1. Building confidence across the Connexion so the local church can and should seek to 'make and grow disciples'.
2. Enabling local churches and circuits, particularly via work with Regional Forums and Districts, to identify their role in their communities and the strategies they will need to adopt to become whole-life and life-long disciples who seek to change the world.
3. Providing or connecting expertise and skills enabling the making and nurturing of Christian disciples.
4. Enabling local churches and circuits, particularly via work with Regional Forums and Districts, in their learning and development for discipleship.
5. Continuing to perform only those ministries and services undertaken 'uniquely or best' on behalf of the whole Church, enabling the local church to give focus to making and nurturing disciples.

6. Identifying and helping cross-fertilise what is working within Methodism on discipleship within the wider Christian Church in Britain and abroad.
7. Helping the local church articulate and ground its understanding of discipleship within God's will for us as a Connexion, and as part of a 'World Methodist family'.
8. Providing resources, events, networks, and people to encourage and support local churches to be, make and grow disciples.

Practical impact

25. In fulfilling this mission, which will provide a context for the work of the Connexional Team from 2010-2013, we hope to see some significant practical developments across the Methodist Connexion during this time although the practical outworking throughout the Connexion will be realised most clearly in the longer term. While the developments may be many and varied we specifically aim to support Regional Forums, Districts, Circuits and Churches to enable the following:
 1. A greater number of churches showing growth in both the numbers and maturity of disciples.
 2. A greater number of Methodist churches in Great Britain with an age and ethnic diversity profile reflecting the community in which they minister and serve.
 3. A greater number of groups and 'fresh expressions' which are designed to facilitate, feed, nurture, extend and explore contemporary Christian discipleship.
 4. A greater number of people, connected with the Methodist Church in membership and other affiliations, able to live out authentic discipleship in each part of their lives with confidence and sensitivity.
 5. Increased emphasis on effective Methodist discipleship in training for lay and ordained ministries.
 6. Increased annual support for the Methodist Church in Great Britain and world Church partners through greater practical, creative and financial gifting.
26. A thematic approach is set out at Annex 3 indicating how our work could build overtime to making, growing and nurturing discipleship in the Methodist tradition – recognising that activities bringing the themes to life will be a combination of concurrent and consecutive.

Impact on the future

27. The outcomes of our discipleship mission relate to the long term difference, beyond 2013, we hope to make - a lasting legacy for Christians in the Methodist tradition. The impact we hope to experience is that:
 - Methodists are confident disciples of Christ and lovingly making new disciples.
 - The Methodist tradition plays a transformational role within the wider Christian church in sharing in God's mission.
 - Methodism is positively recognised for its good stewardship of resources locally, nationally and internationally, responding freely and faithfully to God's grace.

Connexional Team, November 2009

Annex 1
Recognising Methodist Discipleship

A follower of the teaching and person of Jesus Christ	A follower of Jesus growing in Christian maturity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith grounded in experience • Personal experience of Jesus • Being sensed and making sense • A worshipping community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never being complacent • Seeing Christian perfection in the present and future – given and sought as a gift • A quest for holiness • Scriptural holiness
A follower of Jesus in relationship with others through Christ	Sharing in God's mission to redeem 'all things in Christ' and bring in the Kingdom of God
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needing others • Learning and accountability • Watching over one another in love • Social holiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission and kingdom focused • Offering Christ in word and deed • Transforming • Evangelism

Annex 2

Disciple All – A Connexional Team Mission for Discipleship 2010-2013

Intentional action

1. Building confidence across the Connexion so the local church can and should seek to 'make and grow disciples'.
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4. Enabling local churches and circuits, particularly via work with Regional Forums and Districts, in their learning and development for discipleship.
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6. Identifying and helping cross-fertilise what is working within Methodism on discipleship within the wider Christian church in Britain and abroad.
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Lasting legacy beyond 2013

- Methodists are confident disciples of Christ and lovingly making new disciples.
- The Methodist tradition plays a transformational role within the wider Christian church in sharing in God's mission.
- Methodism is positively recognised for its good stewardship of resources locally, nationally and internationally, responding freely and faithfully to God's grace.

Annex 3

Draft Indicative themes 2010-2013

An indicative thematic approach provides a flavour of the focus and direction of Connexional Team activity during 2010-2013. It is recognised that the practical outworking of activities throughout the Connexion takes time and will be most clearly realised in the longer-term.

