

Statistics for Mission Report 2014

Contact Name and Details	Alan Piggot, Research Officer (Statistics and Mapping), 020 7467 3776
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Information
Resolution	57/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform the Methodist Council of developments in the annual Statistics for mission process; • To provide information on the full scope of statistical reporting available or planned to be available on the Methodist website and Methodist webmap; • To set out collection and reporting priorities for the future; and • To provide a connexional-level report on the “annual membership returns”
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting Process • 2014 Report headlines • New Reporting Procedures • Dissemination and Research Promotion • Ongoing and Future Development
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<p>SO 054 (12-13); 358; 664(8);</p> <p>Statistics for Mission 2008 – 2010 (2011 Conference Report, Agenda 2, pp. 653 – 684.)</p>

Summary of Impact

Wider Connexional	The information provided in the 2014 Statistics for Mission Report and the more detailed reporting available to all members of the Church online and through the Methodist webmap should impact on decision making and planning throughout the Church.
External (eg ecumenical)	Development of Methodist statistical collection and reporting takes place within the context of an emerging Church statistics research community involving principal ecumenical partners.

Statistics for Mission Report 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper seeks to update the Methodist Council on progress towards compilation of the triennial Statistics for Mission report due to be presented to this year's Methodist Conference, giving an indication of the main points it is likely to cover and the themes it will likely rehearse. Although all data from the recently completed statistical returns round has now been gathered and analysis of the figures is well underway, it would be premature to report detailed results in advance of verification and reasonableness checks.
- 1.2 The Statistics for Mission Report will aim, as in previous years,
- to inform the Conference of developments in the annual Statistics for Mission process;
 - to provide information on the full scope of statistical reporting available or planned to be available on the Methodist website and Methodist webmap;
 - to set out collection and reporting priorities for the future; and
 - to provide a connexional-level report on the "annual membership returns".
- This last aim represents the actual reporting requirement under Standing Orders and has been used to platform additional and related material in the triennial statistics report.¹

2. The Reporting Process

- 2.1 The past triennium saw the Statistics for Mission process come of age as it passed the tenth year of the annual returns process (annual returns in their current format were introduced in 2002). During that time, electronic data capture has been introduced, data categories reviewed and refined, passwords and protocols streamlined and good communications established between local church returning officers and the Statistics Team. Response rates have progressively increased and response times shortened so that for the statistics year most recently ended (2013), a 99% response rate was achieved within an accelerated three-months collection-and-chasing timeframe. Filling in and returning the forms has bedded down as an accepted part of circuit life, and thanks have been expressed to those involved in the process personally, by email and through journals such as *Property Matters*.
- 2.2 The ongoing challenge is to disseminate and make use of in excess of an estimated 20 million data items accumulated over an eleven year period. Methodists have traditionally led the way in collecting and counting church numbers: the task now turns to presenting and analysing these figures in ways which support mission, deepen insight and inform forward-planning. The most significant development over the triennium period has been the launch of the Methodist webmap in 2012. The standard version, now downloadable in app or tablet format, serves primarily as a "Find a Church" facility. The advanced version links in to ten-year membership statistics for each Local Church, and to a range of contextual data such as local census and deprivation data. With a respectable if not overwhelming 7,000 site visits a year, the advanced webmap has potential to be better promoted for use locally and further developed, and progress has already been made in refreshing the data – for example by updating 2001 to 2011 census figures.

¹ SO 358(2). "The Team shall prepare every three years a report on the annual membership returns for presentation to the Conference." There is no explicit reference to other statistical measures besides membership, such as attendance figures, group activity or Community Roll size. Nor is it explicit that the report confine itself to the triennial period or the statistical year preceding that in which Conference is held.

3. 2014 Report Headlines

- 3.1 Otherwise, reporting has tended to concentrate on tabular presentation of membership and attendance figures which show year-on-year decreases across the connexion and suggest a narrative of general decline.² This year's report will note Methodist membership to stand at 208,679 as at 31 October 2013, compared with 231,708 three years previously (LEP churches excluded); and average weekly attendance at 193,210 compared with 208,962. But it will also fill out this narrative to report over a ten year, as well as a one- and three-year timeframe, thus looking to see if individual year-on-year variances add up to an overall trend. Thus we will find, for example, that while weekly attendance has fallen 32% over the course of a decade, the rate of decline has slowed from 4.5% a year during in the first triennium period (2004 to 2007) to 2.6% during the third (2010 to 2013).
- 3.2 This extended timeframe also allows membership and attendance trends to be compared with other less frequently reported measures of Methodist activity and presence, such as numbers of ministers and numbers of "churches" (both "societies" and "buildings"). One significant statistic will be the 47% drop in Methodist Community Roll numbers over the ten year period. This may indicate not so much an actual decline in outreach to those within the pastoral care of Local Churches as a change in the way those numbers are recorded and reported. Opportunity may be taken in the 2014 statistics returns round to survey churches' operation of the Community Roll system.

4. New Reporting Measures

- 4.1 To indicate the strength and vitality of Methodist activity outwith Sunday and weekday services of worship, the report will promote the extensive statistical information which is collected on groups and Fresh Expressions of church. Using a standardised weekly attendance measure, 65% of Methodist corporate activity takes place in groups and outreach work, as opposed to 26% in church on Sunday (the balance is accounted for by Fresh Expressions and weekday church services). The report will endeavour to flesh out the types of groups and activities involved, and the extent of commitment in terms of lay input and volunteer hours.
- 4.2 Analysis of collected statistics had tended to concentrate on comparisons across Districts, Circuits and even individual Local Churches within Circuits. The 2014 report will make use of other categories and figures routinely used in the Statistics for Mission process to present other top-level analyses: for example, by church type (town centre; inner-city; council estate; suburban; village/rural); by church size (looking to use Methodist-appropriate definitions of what constitutes "small", "medium" and "large" churches); and by church demographics (comparing churches with varying proportions of children and young people). The aim will be to provide a basic top-level, up-to-date map of Methodism which may be compared to a similar picture ten years previously and so suggest trends and framework for charting future mission and growth.

5. Dissemination and Research Promotion

- 5.1 To relate the connexional picture to Methodist local churches, membership and attendance data for individual churches dating back to 2002 has been cleaned up for review, comment and correction by circulation through the Circuits. Further work is ongoing to verify numbers in two areas that have presented challenges to the recording and reporting process: church closures and LEPs. The latter will require consultation with ecumenical partners to establish

² The booklet accompanying the 2011 statistics triennial report was entitled *Are we yet Alive?*

common procedures and workable reporting bases. However, first-release figures will be made available for uploading onto the Methodist Church website to serve as a resource for the emerging research community which is forming within the Discipleship & Ministries learning Network (DMLN) and for local church-based members who have expressed an interest in such material during the annual statistics returns round.

6. Ongoing Development

6.1 The report will give an indication of the development potential of statistical reporting that may emerge through increased research engagement and in conjunction with Scholarship, Research & Innovation (SRI) work strands within the DMLN.

- First, it will demonstrate how traditional membership and attendance figures may be combined with other information held on the connexional database to provide insight and perspective on Methodist activity and mission. An illustrative example is the combination of mission and minister statistics to calculate comparative average weekly attendances per active minister, which in 2013 ranged from 73 in one District to 185 in another around a connexional mean of 131.
- Secondly, it will suggest how Methodist held data may be combined with publicly available external data, such as the *Neighbourhood Statistics* material compiled from the 2011 National Census.
- Thirdly, in conjunction with the Methodist webmap, it will show how this local contextual data could be mapped – to provide, for example, summary reports for each Circuit showing its population and population characteristics, as well as details of Local Churches.

6.2 Ongoing work should give serious consideration to routine monitoring of age, gender and ethnicity on a connexion-wide basis. The 2014 report will reference the one-off age and gender question which accompanied the 2012 statistics returns round and found that 69% of Methodist member respondents were female and 69% were aged over 65. Routine monitoring should be aligned to national monitoring patterns established in the ten-year census round, with the suggestion that Methodist numbers could be surveyed every census year and every mid-year between censuses. This would indicate 2015 as the next year for surveying age, gender and ethnicity.

*****RESOLUTION:**

57/1. The Council receives the report.