

Draft Foundations of a Connexional Evangelism and Growth Strategy

Contact names and details	Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth, hallt@methodistchurch.org.uk Jude Levermore, Head of Mission, levermorej@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	69/1. The Council receives the report. 69/2. The Council affirms the general direction of travel.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper offers a summary of how the Strategic Foundations paper was created and a short digest of that paper, so that the Council can affirm the general direction of travel.
-------------------------	--

- Following the 2018 Conference reaffirmation of *Our Calling*, a new Evangelism and Growth Team was appointed in 2018/2019 to work with leaders across the Connexion (1) to help the Church focus on evangelism, and (2) to inspire, design, and embed a contextual, coherent, and coordinated Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth.
- In 2018/2019, the Methodist Council focused on evangelism as a crucial dimension of our faith and directed the following as key Council objectives¹:
 - To have provided the resources and momentum for Districts to establish credible strategies for growth and increased evangelism.*
 - Each church, Circuit, and District to have in place a "Mission Plan" to underpin the future direction of work, including deployment of personnel and use of reserves.*
 - To evaluate gaps in our apologetic resources to ensure the Church has access to the best resources possible.*
 - To develop a strategy for evangelism and discipleship for those less well served by reason of race or class.*

These objectives formed the basis for the connexional Evangelism and Growth Strategy. This strategy is a major way in which the Council will aim to fulfil the objectives around Evangelism.

- The Evangelism and Growth Team is committed to building this strategy in a truly collaborative and joined up way. Since 2018 it has:
 - Led 75+ on-the-ground listening consultations and theological workshops with groups in every region of the Connexion.
 - Engaged in hundreds of individual conversations with leaders and practitioners across Methodism's broad theological and ecclesial spectrum.
 - Met with Chairs of key connexional committees, District Chairs, the Connexional Leaders' Forum, and Connexional Team colleagues in the Conference Office, Ministries Team, Mission Team, and the Learning Network.
- After incorporating the input from those consultations into an initial strategic intent paper and seeking robust feedback, the Evangelism and Growth team offers this Strategic Foundations paper as an outline of the proposed general direction of travel (see attached document for a short digest).

¹ MC/18/72 Methodist Council Objectives

5. The costs for this strategy will be planned for and included in the normal connexional budgeting process.
6. As the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Ministries Committee, and the Methodist Council engage with the content of the Strategic Foundations paper through autumn and winter 2019/2020, the strategy and strategic map will continue to develop in preparation for the 2020 Conference, when they will be presented as part of the Council's *Our Calling* report.
7. The Council will be updated with any further developments at its January 2020 meeting.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

69/1. The Council receives the report.

69/2. The Council affirms the general direction of travel.

God For All

Foundations of the Connexional Evangelism and Growth Strategy

Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth | hallt@methodistchurch.org.uk | 020 7467 3776

Introduction and Primary Rationale

The calling of the Methodist Church is **to respond to the Gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ** and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through Worship, Learning and Caring, Service, and Evangelism.

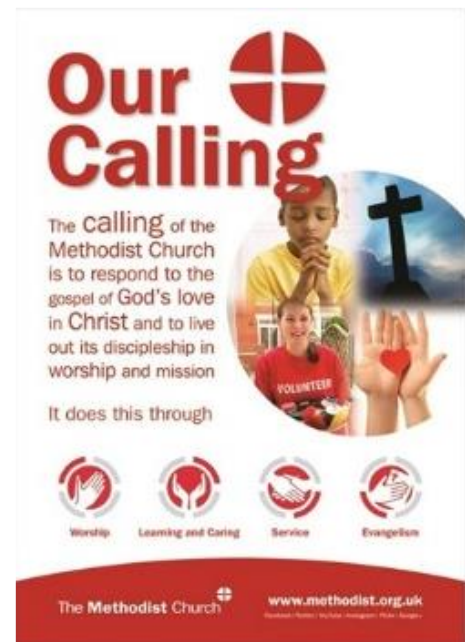
We are called to be a growing, evangelistic, inclusive church of diverse people who speak of, listen for, and live out the goodness of God – so that **new people become disciples of Jesus Christ and committed Methodists experience a deepening of faith.**

Convicted by the Holy Spirit, who is surfacing a profound honesty about our current reality and stoking a new passion for more people and the whole world to be transformed by God's grace, **the Methodist Church has claimed evangelism as an imperative dimension of our mission and identity** in the 21st century.

Following the Methodist Conference's reaffirmation of *Our Calling*, a new Evangelism and Growth Team was appointed in 2018/2019. Comprising 10 full- and part-time staff, the team is now working diligently with leaders across the Connexion and with our ecumenical partners **to inspire, architect and embed a contextual, coherent and coordinated Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth.**

Committed to building this strategy in a truly collaborative way, since September 2018 the Evangelism and Growth Team has led 75 on-the-ground listening consultations and theological workshops with groups in every region of the Connexion, and has engaged in hundreds of individual conversations with leaders and practitioners across Methodism's broad theological and ecclesial spectrum. We have taken this approach because we believe that God speaks through God's people. The connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth will be clearer, stronger, more practical, and potentially more achievable if it emerges from the prayers, passions, wisdom, and questions of people faithful to the living God in different places, with different perspectives and beliefs.

This goal of this collaborative work is to build a deeply embedded commitment to evangelism and growth for the present and future life of our Church. We are not suggesting any impetuous quick-fix, magic new resource, or seasonal initiative. We hope to signal a direction of travel for deep Gospel transformation not only for the next three to five years but also for the long-term future of our mission and whole life together. Though this expansive strategy will require much soul-searching, courageous decision-making, and significant structural change in the years ahead, we pray that it will be a gift to the Church and a blessing from God for all those who love God and want others to experience the love of God for themselves.



Biblical and Theological Foundations

Our Calling begins with God and our experience of the Good News. Our searching, our faith, our mission, our prayer – none of this is generated by us alone. It all starts from God who is before the beginning of everything, the source and sustainer of all life. Anything good and gracious that the Church accomplishes flows from “Missio Dei”, God’s mission that we are invited to join and be changed by. John Wesley’s articulation of prevenient grace – “grace that comes before” – points to this foundational theme, which is a key aspect of the “general tenor” of Scripture.

We want every aspect of our connexional commitment to evangelism and growth to flow from this amazing grace. Of course, we must also have an intelligent understanding of changing demographics, cultural and social shifts, and the patterns of younger generations: and our strategy must engage these factors in relevant, savvy, and compelling ways. But ultimately the future of the Church is not strategy, however brilliant or effective: the future of the Church is the risen Lord Jesus Christ, known by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are committed to evangelism and growth because we have been met by and are undergoing the Living God. This God – in the birth, life and teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again in glory of Jesus Christ – creates, reconciles, and redeems the whole world so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all people and the whole Creation will flourish and therefore glorify God.

This renewed commitment to evangelism and growth underpins our commitment to be a Church that aligns with the “Missio Dei”, the mission of God for all. Our desire to be a growing church that reaches new people and new groups of people flows from our experience of God. We recognise humbly that even as we seek to join with God, the “Missio Dei” will challenge us in profound ways. But we know this wrestling is holy ground. We remember that when our foremothers and forefathers in the first-century Church experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter preached was being poured out on all flesh, their understanding and practice around who was welcome, affirmed, and fully incorporated into church membership and leadership continued to be challenged and expanded. Their communal struggle and ongoing sanctification led to the inclusion of Gentiles, women, people of diverse nationalities, eunuchs and many other groups.

For Methodists, this ever-widening, prayerful, Pentecostal incorporation is linked theologically both to the process of salvation, of which inclusion is a necessary dimension, and to a strengthened mission to the world. A traditional summary of Methodist teaching holds that **“All need to be saved. All may be saved. All may know themselves saved. All may be saved to the uttermost.”** The Holy Spirit continues to enliven the Methodist Church in the 21st century as we aspire to join with our ecumenical partners and lead the larger Church in proclaiming the Good News of a God for all, and a Church for all.

As we proclaim this Gospel, we surrender to be transformed by it ourselves. We name these particular commitments – to becoming a Church, ever more transformed by God, that:

- Seeks robust ecumenical partnerships rooted in mission and action
- Practices anti-racism and is increasingly multi-ethnic
- Recognises, affirms, and celebrates the presence and ministry of LGBTQ+ persons
- Expects and nurtures the participation of children, youth and young adults
- Ministers in rural, estate, urban, suburban and village contexts

Unceasing Prayer

To embrace theologically this divine gift and ongoing promise is to seek it in prayer. To paraphrase Evagrius of Pontus, a fourth-century Church father who deeply influenced John Wesley: *if we are theologically rooted, we will pray truly. If we pray truly, we will be theologically rooted.* Therefore,

as we set about our work, we commit to intentional, unceasing prayer, so that our commitments to evangelism, church growth, mission with those who are poor and those who are young, and pioneering and church planting will flow from a deep, contemplative orientation to God's grace, voice, and will for us and the world.

One of the particular gifts of Methodism to the Church of Jesus Christ is an insistence that prayer and evangelism, contemplation and justice, should never be separated: they are two sides of the same Gospel coin. As we seek to be a church more fully alive with grace and truth, a people acting courageously and justly in the world, we come to God in prayer: we call upon the Lord and ask for renewal, revival, and resurrection; we confess and repent of our sin and seek forgiveness; we wait upon the Lord in silence and attentiveness; and we trust God to transform us by God's grace.

In addition to calling the whole Church to prayer, we have commissioned a team of intercessors to pray in a regular, focused way for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, and for the Methodist Church to align sacrificially and joyously with the expansiveness of the Kingdom.

Core Orientations

1. Centred in God, Freed in Christ, Sent by the Spirit: Whole-Life Discipleship

God is the Three-in-One who creates us, loves us, frees us, saves us, and transforms us to be who God has always been calling us to be. This is the reason we exist and missionally *what* the Church exists to be and do. We receive, embody, proclaim, and invite others into relationship with God. If we are faithful, our mission intentionally flows from this orientation.

2. Everyone an Evangelist

While some people have been given particular spiritual gifts as evangelists, we believe all disciples of Jesus are called to listen for, speak of, and live out the Good News – from their own skin, experience, theology, and perspective. We are all called to be evangelists – to witness to the Gospel. Responding to this calling does not require a personality transplant or the adoption of a theological stance we do not resonate with. Being an evangelist means starting authentically from where we actually are.

3. Transformational Leadership

Some leaders are born, but many are made. We will invest in extensive leadership development for our ministers and lay people, in order to expand the capacity of those who are willing and able. Transformational leaders receive God's vision for the churches (new and/or existing) they serve; build ownership and joy for that vision; focus and grow energy, teams, and strategy around that vision; welcome and transform conflict; coach leaders who then identify and coach other leaders; and build momentum for new life in the church and community.

Core Strategic Streams

4. New Places for New People

New Places for New People are projects whose primary goal is to start, build, and reproduce new Christian communities among unaffiliated people. These include church plants, pioneer experiments, Fresh Expressions, missional communities, etc. New Places for New People are the most effective means of connecting new people, new people groups and new residents to Christian exploration and community. In addition, they bring learning from experimental "research and development", identify and strengthen emerging leaders, and help the whole Church reflect on and examine its calling.

5. Every Church a Growing Church

Churches who consciously centre in the Gospel, build real relationships in their communities, prioritise making new disciples, and make reflective evangelistic decisions about how to steward their time, energy, and money will experience spiritual growth/joy and, the great majority of the time, numerical growth. Rooted in God, we start to expect change and growth.

6. Church of the Poor | Church at the Margins

The promise of new life and new leaders grows in the heart of many of the most marginalized communities. How can the Church learn from our “indigenous” leaders who already have deep knowledge and wisdom about their communities? How can leaders across socio-economic classes partner with each other so that we can all continue to imagine new ways of being church and community together? How can we steward resources with a faithful and preferential bias for people experiencing poverty?

7. Young Evangelists, Pioneers, and Planters

We know that conversion and commitment to faith happens for most people when they are young. We want to become again a church that is fuelled by the full participation of young people, so that their imaginations and faith formation are nurtured and supported – but also so that the Church can be challenged and converted by them.

8. Digital Presence: Mission for the Digital Age

In the digital age of communication, the internet is our parish – particularly for younger generations who spend 15+ hours a day online but also for those who are isolated, housebound, or far from home. We need a digital and social media transformation in how we relate to iGen/Gen Z and all of those whose lives are inextricably connected in this way. We must develop approaches to online evangelism and Christian community that are not simply digital versions of those offline.