

Report from the Connexional Team

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	To Note

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to the Methodist Council Objectives.
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1. This report provides the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to the Methodist Council Objectives since the last report in January 2021.

Proclaiming the Gospel through worship/ The ministry of the whole people of God in the life of the World

2. The Team continues to support this objective in a range of ways including facilitating training for worship leading and preaching, providing worship resources, supporting vocations, offering training to support ministry, and engaging with worship alongside our global partners.
3. The Local Preachers Board of Studies instigated a comprehensive review of the portfolio assessment process, which resulted in a radical overhaul of the portfolio process for Worship: Leading & Preaching (WLP). Intensive development work, with significant contributions from the Learning Network, enabled version 3.0 of the course website to be opened in September 2020 for new enrolments. From November 2020, all eight modules in WLP 3.0 were opened to students who wish to transfer from version 2.0. There are now 267 enrolled users on WLP 3.0 and user feedback has been encouraging. Further details on WLP 3.0 are available at www.methodist.org.uk/wlp3
4. One positive aspect of COVID-19 has been the rapid adoption and acceptance of online technology in the training of Local Preachers. The cancellation of WLP Summer School at Cliff College prompted us to offer an online version on Zoom, which was attended by 80 students. The success of this resulted in a plan to run similar Explore Online sessions twice yearly in January and July. Online Inductions commenced in October. All newly-enrolled students and their tutors are invited to attend a 90-minute online session introducing the course and the learning process. Take-up and attendee feedback have been most encouraging and reflected in reduced anxiety amongst new students and tutors.
5. The Vocations Strategy and the New Places for New People aspect of the *God for All* strategy have provided a catalyst for taking a closer look at the calling of local preachers and the many roles they are called to perform as local theologians, educators and social entrepreneurs. As we have been called to review our training materials by the Board of Studies, we will ask whether our training and development pathways and resources are fit for purpose in encouraging and equipping those who are called by God to serve in these ways.
6. The Marketing and Publishing teams are supporting the planning and delivery for the Festival of Vocations. The next issue of *the connexion* magazine is to be dedicated to stories of 'calling' in the Church.

7. From February to May, the Love This Calling campaign will bring focus to the work on Vocations (supported by the social media campaign #LoveThisCalling). We will promote Vocations Sunday on 2 May, and then on to a vocations Living Library on 22 May. Three new printed resources will be available: a small journal aimed at all congregations to help people reflect on their own callings, a set of postcards to help people reflect on roles in church life, and a resource for leaders to be intentional about developing vocations.
8. Building on the success of the Christmas service CD, the Communications and Publishing teams have worked together to produce a new worship CD for Easter – we are pressing 27,000.
9. Work is underway to prepare the 2021/2022 *Methodist Prayer Handbook*, to be entitled *A Place for All*. We are keen to increase the number of photographs included from around the Connexion and the World Church, and would encourage anyone with high resolution images that reflect themes of inclusion, welcome and celebration and reconciliation, particularly in Methodist, or ecumenical or interfaith contexts with us, to consider offering them for consideration for publication.
10. A further extension to the copyright waiver to 31 August 2021 has been agreed allowing anyone to use wholly-owned TMCP content in online worship without need for further permission. The Publishing team are working with the Faith & Order Committee to bring forward a timeline for the release of a range of electronic and eBook versions of the *Methodist Worship Book*. This is a complex challenge, not least due to the copyright restrictions on the content not owned by TMCP.
11. Together with the Safeguarding team the Learning & Development team are running a series of webinars around bullying and harassment with three separate foci; Positive Working Together; Reconciliation and Mediation Team Project and the Inclusive Methodist Church.
12. The Learning & Development team alongside the Evangelism & Growth and Ministries teams are also offering a Connexion-wide approach to Bible Month this year focusing on Mark's Gospel. This is seen as part of enhancing worship and developing biblical literacy.
13. The Global Relationships team is supporting churches with the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) in sharing in online worship with global partners and enabling contributions from partners to MCB prayer resources in combined work led by others within the Connexional Team.
14. The Global Relationships team is also sharing in the East Anglia District Mission Event and supporting Methodists for World Mission.

A Church for all people/ The Inclusive Church

15. The Team continues to support this Objective in a range of ways, and will be further boosted by the appointment of the Inclusive Church Implementation Officer role.
16. Each member of the Ministries team has engaged in unconscious bias training and has a Planning, Development and Review (PDR) target focusing on enabling the Inclusive Church initiative.
17. Work is underway around a set of communities of practice for ministers in like contexts/phases of ministry. This has been shared by colleagues from the Inclusive Church strands and is awaiting their comment.

18. The Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) pilot project continues to develop well. The project manager has spoken with District Chairs, Superintendent Ministers, District reconciliation group conveners, and the Learning and Development teams within the pilot regions.
19. The Director of Regional Learning & Development along with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser and the Communications team are working on producing an unconscious bias video based resource which is intended for use within Church Councils, Circuit Meetings and other gatherings to introduce unconscious bias. The video will include input from the Secretary of the Conference, the Warden of the Diaconal Order, one of the Chairs of the London District, and the Youth President. The resource will enable those attending to engage in conversation together as we seek to understand more about our own unconscious bias and the way as a whole Church we can pay attention to this important issue and work to minimise any negative impact from unconscious bias on our decision making and engaging with others. The work is progressing well and we hope to have the finished resource available in early March.
20. The Heritage team is collaborating with the EDI team to establish research and collate sources of information on the history and legacy to Methodism of transatlantic slavery. Members of the Council will be aware of the greater attention that has been paid in recent months to the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. In spite of Wesley's unambiguous abhorrence of slavery and his support of abolition, there were Methodists here and in what were then British colonies who benefitted from the trade in human beings. A small group within the Connexional Team has been drawn together to investigate, drawing on external expertise what needs to be done to uncover the extent to which Methodist churches might have benefitted directly or indirectly from the trade and what public statements and reparation might need to be offered. This work will continue and future reports will be brought to the Council.
21. The Heritage, Property and Conservation teams have started to explore the implications to churches of proposed new legislation on 'contested heritage' such as memorials and statues.
22. We have established 3Generate 365 and have had a good number of groups register interest as part of an ongoing strategy for participation of children, youth and young adults in the full life of the Church and its mission. The key to its success will be the continued development of District Ambassador Teams working with us each year in building sustainable engagement with churches. Satellite groups (event design groups made up of children and youth groups) are also a crucial part of the 365 strategy and are focused on the 3Generate event aspect of 365. They have been established and are working on gathering children and young people for this year's programme development.
23. *Contingency strategy for 3Generate Event 2021*: we have three delivery options that will allow us to continue planning as the way ahead post lockdown emerges.

A: Option A will be a full residential event at the NEC at the end of October as originally planned. Taking into account Government Guidance on numbers that can attend and restrictions such as social distancing it is possible that the venue has the capacity to manage this type of event with plenty of space to manage interaction and distancing.

B: Option B will be a partial/ limited residential event - long distance groups (travel time outside a two-hour radius of the event venue) only would be offered accommodation onsite and stay over using a socially distanced spaced out camping area.

For people within two hours travel of the NEC we could offer one of the following options;

1. A single day event on Saturday and a single day event on Sunday repeating programme with the option to split delegate numbers across the two days to manage social distancing.
2. Two single day events that can be attended as day delegates on both days.

C: Option C will be a fully on-line 3Generate event.

Currently all three scenarios are in planning. We will look to make a final decision in June 2021 on which option to deliver.

God's Church in God's world/ Striving for Justice and Peace

24. The Joint Public Issues Team continues to work towards this objective in a number of ways:
 - The [Reset The Debt](http://resetthedebt.uk) campaign held a roundtable, chaired by the Bishop of Durham, and is looking at working more closely with a range of stakeholders to push for the cancellation of unpayable household debts (<http://resetthedebt.uk>). Before Christmas, supporters sent their MPs a "bauble" as a gift, reminding them of the people weighed down by debt. These were really creative and included baubles made from glass, gingerbread and crocheted wool.
 - The latest [Faith in Politics podcasts](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/podcast) featured interviews with Lord Alf Dubs and Louise Davis (Christians on the Left). (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/podcast)
 - The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into effect. The Methodist Church helped to make and participate in [a short film of faith leaders](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/tpnw-22nd/) speaking out for peace. (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/tpnw-22nd/)
 - JPIT produced a short briefing of the impacts of Brexit and a [prayer](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/a-prayer-for-brexit/) for the transition (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/a-prayer-for-brexit/)
 - JPIT worked with the Methodist Church's *God for All* campaign, producing a focus on justice for the Sundays of Advent.
 - There was a series of [blogs](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/homeless-outreach-in-the-winter-of-coronavirus-looking-to-the-future) looking at the issue of homelessness during the time of COVID. (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/homeless-outreach-in-the-winter-of-coronavirus-looking-to-the-future)
 - An occasional series of guest blogs has begun, looking at issues of justice particularly from an anti-racist viewpoint.
 - The Methodist COP26 workers have developed a campaign focusing on the phrase "we believe in Climate Justice for all". They are working globally to develop resources and have met with stakeholders across the world to build support.
 - JPIT has continued to help build and develop Climate Sunday, including engagement with our denominations and an active role on the steering group. The team held a coffee break session for local churches on 18 February.
 - JPIT has contributed reflections and actions to All We Can's Lent resources, [Change Begins](http://www.allwecan.org.uk/resources/lent/). (www.allwecan.org.uk/resources/lent/)
25. The Ministries team is working with the Methodist Schools bodies and the Methodist Schools Committee in the development of a new schools strategy, and in supporting the emerging and evolving work in our schools. Through the Cathedrals Group of universities and our ecumenical partners, we are collaborating in responding to current policy directions in Higher Education, with a particular emphasis on widening access and prioritising marginalised communities in our educational mission.

Evangelism / God For All

26. The first five months of *God for All* have been full to overflowing as hundreds of leaders, churches, circuits and districts begin to engage deeply. In addition to updated [webpages](#), new

social media channels, and a soon-to-be published (in digital and print) how-to-get-started guide, ***Next Steps in Evangelism and Growth***, the following programmes have launched or are in final stages of pre-launch preparation.

Centred in God

- *Year of Prayer* online prayer meetings with a missional orientation have taken place every Tuesday lunchtime since the beginning of September 2020. Particular emphasis has been placed on reflecting the diversity within the Methodist Church in the leadership of the prayer meetings, and this diversity has also been seen in the participants. Weekly attendance has been between 130 and 150 with 2000+ participating afterwards on social media.
- A series of webinars on prayer commenced in 2021 which include prayer during Lent, Thy Kingdom Come, and prayer in a time of desolation and lament.
- *A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL)* is being engaged widely across the Connexion by districts, circuits and churches. MWOL Commitment Cards in more than a dozen languages and a full suite of other resources are available online.

Everyone an Evangelist

- 70 people are currently undertaking the new *Evangelism for Leaders* course, with a further 160 booked on for courses running later in 2021.
- The *Everyone an Evangelist* process – a small groups-based training programme designed to build confidence and capability in the whole church for evangelism, to be undertaken by groups from local churches – is in active development with a diverse design group. Two pilots will launch in May 2021 with wider sign-ups starting in September 2021.
- The *Community of Evangelists* – offering bespoke, responsive content of mutual support, learning, mentoring and spiritual growth to a community of those exercising or exploring a calling as an evangelist – is in active development for launch in September 2021.

Transformational Leadership

- Eight circuit/church teams have completed the inaugural year-long *Transformational Leadership Learning Community*. 20 teams have already signed up for the 2021/2022 cohort, with increased capacity planned for future years.
- In partnership with the Ministries team and the Queen's Foundation, a new tutorial position has been developed in Evangelism and Leadership based at The Queen's Foundation but exercising mission and ministry as an Officer of the Connexional Team. This reflects a deep denominational commitment to the training, equipping and resourcing of all ministers, lay and ordained, in evangelism and leadership, but with a particular focus on those in pre-ordination training.

Every Church a Growing Church

- District mission planning training has run in four districts (Nottingham & Derby, South East, Southampton, Channel Islands), and is being planned for four more (Darlington, Beds, Essex & Herts, Wales Synod, Synod Cymru) in 2020/2021.
- Ecumenical partnership with *Leading your Church into Growth* (LyCiG) developing towards the first Methodist LyCiG conference planned for May 2021 with a high level of interest.
- Eight-step Mission Planning Process developed in conversation with the Learning Network and the Mission Planning Workbook published and available online.

New Places for New People | Church at the Margins

- Ten districts (Birmingham, Chester & Stoke, Darlington, Liverpool, Manchester & Stockport, Northampton, Shetland, Sheffield, Southampton, Yorkshire North & East) are involved in an intensive year-long, community-based discernment and planning process

with the Evangelism and Growth team towards starting new Christian communities in 2021/2022. The testimonies from this process demonstrate the fruitfulness and transformation that can happen in a context of deep listening and missional exploration. The remaining districts are scheduled to engage this planning process in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

- With the new Church at the Margins Officer now serving full-time on the Connexional Team, significant strategic work (in concert with JPIT, Church Action on Poverty, Urban Expressions, Urban Life, and other partners) is taking place to build on the new connections and relationships made as a direct result of the pandemic and to continue serving economically vulnerable people and building new Christian communities.
- The first *Pioneering Digital Community* course in autumn 2020 generated massive interest with over 200 signups; a second course is launching in spring 2021, adapted following feedback from the 2020 cohort.
- Seven teams are part of a pilot to multiply fresh expressions – small, organic faith communities – and increase the missional readiness of circuits and churches to start new experiments in the future.
- The Methodist Pioneer Pathways (MPP) is undergoing an overhaul, including clearer pathways for pioneer vocational discernment and new monthly trainings/conversations for pioneers on the pathway. Since the beginning of 2020/2021, the membership of MPP has increased by 14%.

Digital Evangelism

- Every month the Evangelism and Growth team hosts a number of webinars that dive into missional reflection and practice, building on a teeming archive of recent offerings on subjects from pioneering to anti-racism to A Methodist Way of Life and more.
- The Story Project website now hosts more than 100 diverse video testimonies from across the Church, which can be used for worship or to inspire a culture of testimony in other places. The website has had a complete overhaul for 2021, including a new accessible system for recording testimonies online.
- Social media/digital training sessions have been offered across the connexion; a more cohesive Digital Course, with multiple modules, is being written in conjunction the Communications team and the Learning Network.
- Following the success of #GodIsWithUs – a collaborative digital campaign involving Methodist charities, the global Methodist family, multiple parts of the Connexional Team, and the local church designed to reach people outside of the church with an evangelistic message – contributions are being made to Connexional Team planning towards a regular annual cycle of Church-wide digital campaigns.

27. The Methodist Modern Art Collection management committee is working with Coventry & Nuneaton Circuit, supported by the Engagement team, to create an art trail of works from the collection in September, as part of Coventry City of Culture 2021 (more details can be found in the committee's report to the Council).

Resources for the Church: the use of God's gifts (including Oversight and Leadership)

28. The Team continues to support this Objective by providing a range of resources for those in ministry, and for our global partners, and by supporting the administration of financial matters. This is in addition to the large amount of work undertaken towards Oversight and Trusteeship, and a number of reports are before the Council on this.
29. Work continues on the roll out of Reflective Supervision for all those in Ordained Ministry. Procedures are in place to help District Chairs reflect on how the implementation plan is working in their location. A draft of the Supervision Policy will be presented to the Council

before making its way to the Conference. Continuing development resources are being developed to support ongoing learning in Supervision.

30. Resources have been produced for the Presbyteral Session of the Synod to help ministers reflect on their own wellbeing. This is part of the ongoing work on ministerial workload and wellbeing.
31. Work continues to help ministers exploring their ongoing vocation through events such as First Moves in Ministry, Re-Charge, and the retirement course, when they get an opportunity to reflect carefully on transitions and phases of ministry.
32. Work to support superintendent ministers continues with bespoke sessions for new superintendents and annual gatherings.
33. We continue to develop the theological and intellectual gifts of the Methodist people, through awards towards higher degrees, collaboration with research bodies, and drawing together the first meeting of all Methodist-related institutions as part of the Continuing Development in Ministry strategy, in late February.
34. Working closely with Cliff College and the Learning Network, we are developing online resources for training and theological equipping, for use across the Connexion. These will be piloted later in the year as part of a wider rollout of TheologyX as a connexional learning platform.
35. The Children Youth and Families team is working alongside the Evangelism & Growth team and Cliff College to develop the current One Programme into a One Programme Leadership Year for young adults aged 18-30 years. We have started transitioning the focus of the programme criteria in line with the Evangelism & Growth Strategy criteria. Over the next three to six months we will recruiting host projects and young people for the cohort starting in September 2021.
36. Following the agreement of the Safeguarding Principles for the Methodist Church in Britain and International Partners, World Mission Fund (WMF) Grants forms have been revised to incorporate the requirements of the internal audit into Safeguarding and the WMF.
37. 3Generate global church representatives have been elected and the Global Relationships team is looking forward to working closely with them.
38. There are restructured and more easily navigable Global Relationships pages on the website. There has been sharing on the Global Relationships news webpage in prayer and solidarity with partners across the world facing the challenges of the pandemic, conflict and natural disaster. The first Global Relationships quarterly e-news is planned for March.
39. We are in the final stages of developing a new 'brand book' for Methodist Church print and online publications: this is not a rebrand, but will extend our guidance on tone of voice and visual identity, to ensure a broader but consistent framework for communications and design.
40. The Mental Health First Aid for Adults initial 2-day courses have now been completed and plans are underway for the training of trainers programme to commence, which will be later this year.

Responding to the Gospel in partnership

41. The Team continues to support the Church's partnerships both at home and abroad in various ways.
42. This year has required ongoing support of our two Network Centres at a time of great stress and challenge. Both have responded with energy, faith and generosity to support their students and to keep their vital work alive.
43. We are working with Cliff College on the development of their Vision 21 strategy, and on closer working together in pursuit of connexional priorities.
44. Ongoing work with theological institutions, and with global partners, especially the United Methodist Church and the Irish Connexion, on capacity-building in theological education and allowing the enrichment of our own life and work by global perspectives and learning.
45. A new decision-making body for grants from the World Mission Fund will be constituted with a majority of members drawn from our global Partners.
46. The Global Relationships team is working with Districts to establish and develop twinning links with Partners online. Two new formal twinning relationships recently established, and three conversations are advancing with some other conversations on hold during this current lockdown.
47. There has been sharing of Ecological based resources from Partners in the Pacific.

In closing

48. As always the Council is invited to engage with the Team on any areas it has concerns about through the Connexional Secretary at any time.

*****RESOLUTION**

31/1. The Council receives the report.