

UPPER THAMES METHODIST CIRCUIT

2nd REPORT PROPOSALS FROM THE CIRCUIT MISSION & MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT GROUP [CMMDG]

Dear friends

We were so encouraged by the positive response at the last Circuit Meeting to the draft recommendations for developing our worship, pastoral caring and service. We now present to you our thoughts on mission and evangelism together with Appendix 1 which is a focussed document which extracts and provides more detail from both reports as they apply to the Circuit.

We are clear that there is a pressing need for us to become intentionally missional, both personally and as churches. This means that however we engage in our Church's day to day mission we take every opportunity to name the name of Jesus and not be hesitant in "giving an account of the hope that is within us." We need to be respectful, imaginative and forthright in how we do this. It may well be that we need help, so once again we will seek to provide at Circuit level the necessary training and resourcing in faith learning and sharing. It is no coincidence that as we discuss these critical issues 2020 has been designated a year when we are encouraged as Christians and Churches to tell our stories. Here are some key documents in relation to this that are worth a closer look:-

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-year-of-testimony/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14851/3307-fx-research-report-methodism-s-hidden-harvest.pdf> -

The first 15 years of Fresh Expressions

https://www.godforall.org.uk/uploads/1/1/9/1/119134366/2_vision_refresh_leaflet.pdf

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/evangelism-and-growth-emerging-strategy/> - this is the full report.

On the connexional Methodist Church website look at the Mission and Evangelism section which has a number of exiting and positive suggestions for making 2020 a special year of evangelism.

And just for a great relevant song - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yBzIt_z8oY - Casting Crowns song NOBODY

The following is based on a report called **GOD FOR ALL** – towards a church wide strategy for evangelism and growth, that will be presented to the Methodist Conference 2020. Chris German our lay worker at Abbey Meads was 1 of 250 national delegates invited to London to review the report after a number of consultations had taken place around the connexion. It is proposed that we use this initiative to frame our Circuit wide strategy for Mission and Growth.

IMAGINE A TREE CUT THROUGH THE TRUNK SO WE CAN SEE ITS CORE AND THE SUBSEQUENT RINGS OF GROWTH. The report refers to these rings as PATHWAYS and there are 8 of them.

[In each case the heading will frame the ongoing work between the new Circuit Ministry Network and the Local Churches.]



The report suggests that we look at the 8 pathways in two major sections. The first three are Core Orientations or deliberate attitudes and actions which we need to embed in us. Without these our Mission strategy risks becoming disconnected from the living God and our mission purpose.

1. Centred in God, Freed in Christ, Sent by the Spirit:
Whole- Life Discipleship
2. Everyone an Evangelist
3. Transformational Leadership

The next 5 pathways are called Core Strategic Streams or crucial movements that, spring out of the three Core Orientations and which help to drive fundamental change.

1. New Places for New People
2. Every Church a Growing Church
3. Church at the Margins
4. Young Evangelists, Pioneers and Planters
5. Digital Presence: Mission for the Digital Age

Let's look at the first three, **the Core Orientations**

1. Centred in God,

Freed in Christ, Sent by the Spirit: Whole-Life Discipleship. God 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 is what the Church exists to be and to do. If we are faithful, our mission intentionally flows from this orientation. All we seek to do as Christians and as church must have this at its heart. We mission as an outworking of our desire to share the love of God with His world. We evangelise so others may come to discover the heart of God's love for each person. God's Spirit empowers us for such a challenge as He imparts the love of God in us and gifts us to show the love of Christ through us. Let us draw on the spiritual renewal prompted by our engagement with Holy Habits as a way of establishing a clear, flexible and exciting way of discipleship. As we revisit our Mission Statements let us ensure that we have the proclamation and the demonstration of God's Kingdom and evangelism as a priority.

2. Everyone an Evangelist

While some people have been given particular spiritual gifts as evangelists, all disciples are called to listen for, speak of, and live out the Good News – from their own experience, theology, and perspective. As evangelists we are called to witness to the Gospel. Responding to this calling means starting from where we actually are. We are not good about talking naturally about God and we often lack confidence in telling our own faith story. One of the difficulties we face is that that this reluctance on our part has become embedded in us and it appears that we have become content to engage in mission by 'doing things' but now we need to learn how to 'say the things that matter'.

3. Transformational Leadership

Some leaders are born, but many are made. We need to invest in leadership development for our clergy and laity, in order to expand the capacity of those who are willing and able to help us get where we need to be in mission. Transformational leaders receive God's vision for the churches, they serve; build ownership of that vision; focus and grow energy. They gather teams around that vision and develop strategies to implement it. They coach co-leaders who then identify and bring on board others, building momentum for new life in the church and community

Now let's turn to the **5 Core Strategic Streams** which result from the 3 Orientations

1. 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 the unchurched. These may include church plants, pioneer experiments, Fresh Expressions, missional communities, etc. New Places for New People are the most effective means of connecting new people, groups and new residents to the Christian faith and community. To develop new places for new people we need to learn from those who have engaged with and been successful at mission in today's world. Such pioneers strengthen the whole Church reflect on and continually help us to examine our

calling. Now more than ever we need to be church in ways that shows imagination and takes risks without losing the beauty and passion for Christ which is our inheritance. There are a myriad of faith discovery programmes, designed to help the local church connect their communities with the Gospel. The new Circuit Ministry Network will help you explore these opportunities to find the ones most suitable to your mission context.

2. 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. They are often better placed to experience spiritual growth and, the great majority of the time, numerical growth. Rooted in God, they should start to expect change and experience growth. In this we all have a part to play as every Christian at any church event and in any situation outside the church building is an example of what we believe and stand for, so it's not too much to say that our faith is judged on our example of it. Growing churches are those to which people want to belong so the atmosphere, the welcome, the language, the message, the compassion, the relationships and more are all critical when we seek to share the gospel. How can we all embed quality characteristics in our Christian life, welcome the stranger and pay attention to the small things and improve them? Can we treasure and celebrate what is good and build upon it, sharing the gifts that God has given us to build up all Gods people. In all our Kingdom work and expectations we need to prioritise making new disciples of Jesus. We need to explore opportunities for churches working together, not only within our circuit but ecumenically, to become missional communities – communities of faith – which resonate with the local community and work together in 'growing the Church'.

3. Church of the Poor | Church at the Margins

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 boundaries 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? Ever since its Acts beginnings, the Church has existed at the margins, struggling to gain a foothold in a culture very different from the one they were called to become. But they were commissioned and empowered in that calling. Salt and Light are two very different biblical images of how that task is fulfilled. A church at the margins is going to be uncomfortable with what they find there but these are the very people who NEED US MOST to quote Wesley. What sustains us in this mission is what has always done so – Our CALL, our FAITH our SUPPORT for one another, our LORD'S presence and the HOLY SPIRITS empowering, but above all it is a love for the lost. We will need to ask how we are making the connection between social justice and evangelism. Our proposal for new Pioneer workers may help us address this Mission opportunity.

4. 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 changed by them.

5. 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 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. We live in an age where digital technology has opened up a potential mission opportunity which reaches far beyond our physical capacity or presence. How well are we / or need to be equipped to take this incredible opportunity. Can we imagine an online worshipping community to co-exist and inter act with our gathered church presence?