

55. Circuit Amalgamations

Name and contact details	The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler Secretary of the Conference SoC@methodistchurch.org.uk
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INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference exercises its responsibilities under the Deed of Union (DU 38(a)) to direct the formation 'into Circuits for mutual encouragements and help' the Local Churches of the Connexion when it adopts the Stations as one of the final acts of the Conference each year. In doing so, it adopts any changes to the Circuits which have been proposed to it by Synods under SO 501(3):
'All proposals for the division or amalgamation of Circuits or other changes in their composition or for the adoption of a modified constitution as defined in Standing Order 580 or both shall be considered by the district Policy Committee, which shall consult the Circuit Meetings and Church Councils involved. In the case of changes in composition the committee shall formulate a draft recommendation, obtain the resolutions of the Circuit Meetings and Church Councils on that draft and report those resolutions to the Synod with its own substantive recommendation. The Synod shall make its own recommendation to the Conference, reporting with it the resolutions received by the district Policy Committee and stating whether or not it approves any associated proposals for a modified constitution.'
2. It has not, therefore, normally been the custom of the Conference to receive a report on alterations to the composition of Circuits separate from the adoption of the Stations. This process assumes that the proposed changes are brought to the Conference before the 1 September from which they take effect, even if, as is sometimes the case, the changes in composition are agreed by the District and Circuits concerned a year or more in advance of the change.
3. Recent years have seen circuit amalgamations on a large scale. In such cases, Districts will want to make the decision more than a year in advance of the change in order to allow time for implementation. It can be helpful to the District to have reassurance that the Conference intends to adopt the change proposed. The Conference is therefore asked to note the report of the Scotland Synod and to approve the proposed amalgamation of the Circuits in that District from 1 September 2025.
4. Not every proposed change in composition is unequivocally welcomed by those affected and dissent from the Synod's proposal may be expressed through the

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resolutions adopted by one or more of the Circuits involved. In those circumstances, the Conference is cognizant of SO 501(7):

'If, in the judgment of the Conference, any change resolved upon by the Conference is substantially out of accord with the reported resolution of any Circuit Meeting involved, or, where more than one District is involved, with the recommendation of any Synod, it shall take effect only if confirmed by the Conference of the year next following.'

5. The Conference is therefore asked to note the report of the Cumbria Synod (below) including the voting figures from the Circuits whose amalgamation into the new Cumbria Circuit and to adopt the resolution that the new Circuit be created from 1 September 2025 if, and only if, the change is confirmed by the 2025 Conference (in the adoption of the Stations).
6. The Conference is also asked to note the representation of the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay Circuit and the information sheet produced by the District which was circulated to all Circuits during the consultation (Appendix A).

***RESOLUTIONS

55/1. The Conference receives the Report.

55/2. The Conference resolves under Standing Order 501 that the Circuits in the Scotland District amalgamate to form a single Scotland Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

55/3. The Conference resolves under Standing Order 501 that the Circuits in the present Cumbria District amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

Report from the Scotland Synod

The Synod of the Methodist Church in Scotland, meeting in April 2024, agreed to recommend to the Methodist Conference 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Scotland District amalgamate to form a single Scotland Circuit from 1st September 2025.

It was reported to the Synod that a careful consultation had been conducted and that the process followed was:

February 2023: The District Policy Committee (DPC) with all Superintendent Ministers met for prayerful discernment and to consider models for the future of the District.

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This led to a report and recommendation to the Representative Synod of exploring and engaging in a process that would move towards a shared single circuit.

April 2023: The Synod received and discussed the DPC report and its recommendation. The conversation was made all the richer by the contributions of our ecumenical guests. Having conferred together members of Synod voted to: 'affirm the recommendation of the DPC and commend a shared single Scotland circuit to the circuits for consultation.' (Of the 43 voting synod members present 42 were in favour and 1 against.) SO 501 was noted as providing the appropriate process to follow.

May-August 2023: Consultations with Circuits and churches with open meetings which reported back the general feeling, any concerns or questions raised, any benefits recognised and welcomed. (The Synod report and comments made by Synod members and ecumenical guests were made available to all taking part in consultations.)

September 2023: The DPC and the Synod received the feedback of the consultations and agreed to set up seven working groups (with membership representative from across the District and the six Circuits) to consider and explore issues raised:

Group 1. Organisation, structure, administration

Group 2. Property and Finance

Group 3. Ministry (ordained and lay appointments)

Group 4. Communication

Group 5. Preaching and worship leading

Group 6. Church Life

Group 7. Safeguarding

January 2024: The DPC met to confer over the collated work of the groups and made its recommendation to Circuits and churches as follows:

'The Scotland District Policy Committee recommends that The Methodist Church in Scotland operates as a single Scotland Circuit from 1st September 2025.

'To effect this as simply as possible, five of the current Circuits will come to the end of their existence as charitable bodies on 31st August 2025 and will join with the sixth, the receiving charity, whose name and constitution will be changed accordingly. The decision

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regarding which Circuit will be the receiving charity is yet to be determined but will not imply any Circuit to be more important or valued than any other.

'Accordingly, each Circuit Meeting and Church Council is invited to vote on the following resolution and to report the figures to DPC no later than midday on Wednesday 20 March 2024.

'The X Circuit Meeting or Y Church Council resolves that, under Standing Order 501, the Scotland District Policy Committee and the Scotland District Synod be asked to recommend to the Methodist Conference 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Scotland District amalgamate to form a single Scotland Circuit from 1st September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.'

February-March 2024: Church Councils and Circuit Meetings conferred and voted on the recommendation of the DPC (see below for voting figures).

20 March 2024: The DPC and the Superintendents met to receive and consider the votes of Circuit Meetings and Church Councils. This meeting was unanimous in its decision to recommend to the Synod the formation of a single circuit as proposed to Circuits and Churches.

20 April 2024: The Synod met in Representative Session and received the DPC report and recommendation, including the circuit and church voting data. Following a vote of 52 'for' and 2 'against', the Scotland Synod made its own resolution to the Methodist Conference 2024.

March 2024 - Voting figures from Circuits and Churches

Below are the voting figures received from each Circuit Meeting and Church Council in the District on the following resolution:

The "*name of*" Church Council/Circuit Meeting resolves that, under Standing Order 501, the Scotland District Policy Committee and the Scotland District Synod be asked to recommend to the Methodist Conference 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Scotland District amalgamate to form a single Scotland Circuit from 1st September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

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Circuit Meetings	Votes for	Votes against
Angus, Dundee and Perthshire	20	1
Ayrshire and Renfrewshire	8	0
Forth Valley	16	3
Inverness	12	1
North of Scotland Mission	16	1
Strathclyde	26	0
Church Councils		
ADP Arbroath	9	0
ADP East of Scotland	14	2
ADP Montrose	5	0
A/R Barrhead	6	0
A/R Paisley Central Hall	7	1
FV Armadale	6	1
FV City of Edinburgh	12	0
FV Grahamston United	12	0
FV Granton	2	2
FV Livingston United Parish Church Council	16	0
FV Rosyth	7	0
FV Stirling	13	0
FV Tranent with Cockenzie	8	0
FV Wallacestone	6	0
NoSM Aberdeen	10	0
NoSM Moray Coast	6	0
NoSM Peterhead	7	0
S East Kilbride	9	1
S Ebenezer	7	0
S Glasgow West	14	0
S Kilsyth	5	1
S Netherton	15	0
S New Stevenson	4	1
S Pollokshaws	13	0
S Woodlands	6	0

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Report from the Cumbria Synod

- 1.1 Under Standing Order 501, the Conference is asked to approve the Cumbria District Synod's recommendation that the eight Circuits in the present Cumbria District should amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025.
- 1.2 The possibility of a single Cumbria Circuit was presented to the Cumbria District Synod in April 2022, and, on the recommendation of the District Policy Committee (or Group, as it is known in Cumbria – the 'DPG'), the September 2022 Synod appointed a Cumbria Circuit Group to explore possible options for reconfiguring the circuits in Cumbria. The Group considered alternative models and recommended to the April 2023 Synod that a single Cumbria model Circuit be pursued, for the following summary reasons:
 - A desire to **release energy for local mission and ministry by sharing governance and administration**. Instead of replicating trustee responsibilities and governance processes eight times whilst often struggling to find office holders and spending much time maintaining the structures, or continuing the series of incremental circuit mergers in recent years, amalgamating to form a single Circuit should pool resources and ensure an effective team and collegiality for supporting local churches to enable them to focus on fellowship and outreach.
 - A desire to **promote further ecumenical working within the Ecumenical County of Cumbria** (being, since 2011, a Covenant Partnership in Extended Area) through its common vision and strategy for mission. Removing the internal Methodist circuit boundaries within the county should allow further development of Ecumenical Mission Communities to undertake mission together, whilst allowing necessary Methodist oversight to operate at county level in respect of local Methodist churches, personnel and processes.
 - A desire **within the new merged North West England District** to become a single Circuit coterminous with the designated Cumbria Mission Area within the new District, to enable the Cumbria Circuit/Mission Area to operate with greater coherence and effectiveness as part of the new District.
- 1.3 The April 2023 Synod agreed that the model of a single circuit should be explored. An open well-attended 'Gathering Day' in July 2023 shared both ideas and concerns, and initial views were expressed through an indicative vote. As a result, under Standing Order 501 the DPG recommended to the September 2023 Synod that the Synod endorse a formal consultation with all the circuit meetings and church councils of the Cumbria District, to which the Synod agreed almost unanimously.
- 1.4 The consultation took place between September 2023 and the end of March 2024. Every church council and circuit meeting within the Cumbria District was asked to

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consider an introductory video that explained the proposal, a formal consultation document that explained the process and possible structure for a single county circuit, and some considered the responses to various Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQs'). Each meeting was asked to vote on the following resolution:

The [x Circuit Meeting or y Methodist Church Council] resolves that, under Standing Order 501, the Cumbria District Policy Group and the Cumbria District Synod be asked to recommend to the Methodist Conference of 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Cumbria District amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

- 1.5 During the consultation, support was provided by Cumbria Circuit Group where requested and offered where concerns were expressed. An open and well attended 'Listening Day' was held in February 2024, facilitated by Place for Hope, to help those with different perspectives or concerns to understand each other better. This focused a continuing intention to listen to and learn from each other's different perspectives. The FAQs were further developed and reissued as more comments and questions were received.

2. RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The results of the votes of each Church Council and Circuit Meeting in the Cumbria District are set out in the Table in Appendix 1, and in the Diagrams in Appendix 2.
- 2.2 Findings:
- 2.2.1 The consultation appeared to be effective in terms of the overall numbers of Circuit Meetings and Church Councils that considered the proposal and reported votes: only two possible meetings failed to report a vote, one small Methodist church that struggled to agree a meeting date, and one small Local Ecumenical Partnership ('LEP'). The consultation could therefore be said to have comprehensively tested the mind of the Methodist churches and Circuits in Cumbria.
- 2.2.2 The relevant columns in the Table in Appendix 1 record, where reported, those present and able to vote, and those voting for or against the resolution (as is standard in the Methodist Church, abstentions or neutral votes were not recorded). Generally, the numbers of those able to vote and choosing to express a vote in each meeting were high, or included everyone present and entitled to vote.
- 2.2.3 Every circuit except one voted in favour of the resolution, with voting in favour being very high or unanimous. The Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay Circuit

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('KSAT') voted against, overall reporting 35 votes or 25.5% in favour, and 102 votes or 74.5% against, with all but two churches voting against, but with a closer vote in the Circuit Meeting (13 votes or 43.3% in favour, and 17 or 56.7% against).

2.2.4 **Overall in the Cumbria District**, of the 728 votes cast in Circuit Meetings and Church Councils, **597 or 82% were in favour, and 131 or 18% against.**

2.3 During the consultation, the Cumbria Circuit Group also received some comments, verbally or in writing, in favour or against the proposal. The DPG and Cumbria Circuit Group were concerned to ensure the principles of fairness and evenness, so that the evidential basis for views expressed through the consultation should be the votes recorded in relevant meetings, rather than the number or strength of any views separately expressed with the inherent challenges of interpreting or weighing them, whether for or against. Accordingly, the Cumbria Circuit Group and DPG did not seek additional representations, but where concerns were expressed or clarifications requested, these and potential responses were included in updated FAQs, and will be addressed and incorporated to help the Cumbria Circuit, if approved, to be more effective as a result.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Cumbria Circuit Group considered the consultation results.

3.1.1 Aware that a considerable majority had strongly endorsed the proposal, the group was nevertheless concerned for those who had voted against it, especially in the KSAT Circuit. As at earlier stages, the group offered to meet with representatives and members of KSAT or to attend such meetings as may be helpful, and have wanted to ensure pastoral understanding and support regarding the concerns held.

3.1.2 The group considered several possible options for recommendation to the DPG. These included not proceeding; delaying proceeding; proceeding without seeking to include KSAT (but this raised not only potential sadness but also many concerns both for that Circuit, and for the project overall, with possible detriment resulting from not being a single Circuit within the Cumbria Ecumenical County or within the Cumbria Mission Area of the new North West England District); or proceeding with the proposal on the timetable envisaged.

3.1.3 Wanting to respect that more than four fifths had voted in favour of the proposal and the reasons for it, and given their significant concerns about all the other options in response to the consultation results, the Cumbria Circuit Group recommended to the DPG that it should recommend acceptance of the proposal to the Synod.

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- 3.2 The DPG considered the consultation results and the same possible options, all of which were reported to the Synod, together with further updated FAQs. Under Standing Order 501(3), the DPG resolved to make its own substantive recommendation, that the Synod be invited to pass the following resolution:

The Cumbria District Synod, voting on 27 April 2024, resolves under Standing Order 501(3) to recommend to the Methodist Conference of 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Cumbria District amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

- 3.3 Following full consideration, **the Synod passed the above resolution** (74 voting members present, with voting agreed to be by ballot): **66 votes or 90.4% in favour, and 7 votes or 9.6% against.** The Synod also passed a resolution about the work needed to implement the decision (if approved by the Conference), including to confirm that those concerns which had been expressed should be taken into account in developing the arrangements for a single Cumbria Circuit.
- 3.4 In addition to this report to the Conference, a copy of the consultation document with the Circuit Meetings and church councils, and of the DPG and Cumbria Circuit Group's report to the Synod, have been submitted to the Conference Office. The Orton Methodist Church Council, endorsed by the Newbiggin on Lune Methodist Church Council and by the KSAT Circuit Meeting, have submitted a letter under Standing Order 501(5) expressing their concerns about the proposal, which is included at Appendix 3. Through the FAQs, the Cumbria Circuit Group endeavoured to incorporate and respond to these concerns, the final version of which is included at Appendix 4.
- 3.5 The Conference is asked to approve the Synod's recommendation that the Cumbria Circuits amalgamate to form a single Circuit. Whichever way the Conference votes, inevitably in this case its decision will be "substantially out of accord", either with the KSAT Circuit Meeting if it approves the resolution, or, if it rejects the resolution, with the other seven Circuit Meetings in the Cumbria District. Accordingly, under SO 501(7), the Conference will need to vote on the resolution in both 2024 and 2025 (simple majorities only will be required, and in 2025 this could be by way of adopting the stations). Whilst provisional preparations to implement the new Cumbria Circuit will proceed in readiness for September 2025 if approved, this report has been submitted to enable the two year process, as required in this case, to begin this year to ensure that, if agreed, the Conference's final confirmation can be given in 2025.

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APPENDIX 1 – Consultation Voting figures for Circuit Meetings and Church Councils

Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
9/1 N Cumbria	Circuit Meeting		38	37	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Brampton	19.3.24	12	12	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Carlisle		12	12	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Cornerstone, Wigton		11	9	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Dalston	19.3.24	8	8	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Gilsland	11.3.24	5	4	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Longtown Community	6.3.24	10	7	1			
9/1 N Cumbria	Monkhill		7	7	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Thurstonfield		11	10	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Wetheral	18.3.24	11	11	0			
9/1 N Cumbria	Totals			117	1	118	99.15	0.85
9/4 Wn Fells	Circuit Meeting	19.3.24		23	2			
9/4 Wn Fells	Bassenthwaite			5	1			
9/4 Wn Fells	Brigham			5	2			
9/4 Wn Fells	Cleator Moor			11	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Cockermouth			6	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	(Dearham - Class of Maryport)							
9/4 Wn Fells	Egremont			11	0			

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Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
9/4 Wn Fells	Frizington			6	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	(Gosforth - Class of Seascale)							
9/4 Wn Fells	Great Clifton	27.2.24	6	6	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Harrington			1	3			
9/4 Wn Fells	Hensingham			9	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Keswick			11	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Kirkland LEP			8	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Maryport	26.2.24	13	13	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Seascale			11	0			
9/4 Wn Fells	Workington United			3	1			
9/4 Wn Fells	Totals			129	9	138	93.48	6.52
9/7 KSAT	Circuit Meeting	21.3.24	32	13	17			
9/7 KSAT	Appleby		10	8	0			
9/7 KSAT	Brough		8	1	6			
9/7 KSAT	Brough Sowerby		8	0	7			
9/7 KSAT	Crosby Garrett LEP		8	1	6			
9/7 KSAT	Duffton with Knock		9	1	6			
9/7 KSAT	Kings Meaburn	18.3.24	7	0	2			
9/7 KSAT	Kirkby Stephen		9	1	7			
9/7 KSAT	Newbiggin on Lune		16	0	16			

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Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
9/7 KSAT	Orton		9	0	9			
9/7 KSAT	Ravenstonedale		11	1	7			
9/7 KSAT	Soulby		9	0	7			
9/7 KSAT	Tebay		12	7	4			
9/7 KSAT	(Shap - Class of Tebay)							
9/7 KSAT	Warcop		8	2	2			
9/7 KSAT	Winton LEP		16	0	6			
9/7 KSAT	Totals			35	102	137	25.55	74.45
9/8 Sedbergh	Circuit Meeting	21.2.24	14	13	0			
9/8 Sedbergh	Meth Ch in Western Dales	21.2.24	18	16	0			
9/8 Sedbergh	Totals			29	0	29	100	0
9/9 E Cumbria	Circuit Meeting	13.3.24	21	13	2			
9/9 E Cumbria	Alston	18.2.24	8	8	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Gablesby	4.4.24	10	10	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Kirkoswald	25.2.24	10	10	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Langwathby	15.1.24	9	0	9			
9/9 E Cumbria	Patterdale LEP							
9/9 E Cumbria	Penrith	29.2.24	18	8	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Salkeld Dykes							

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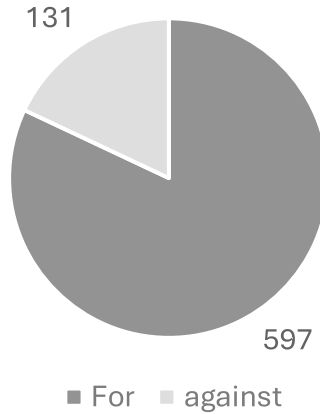
Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
9/9 E Cumbria	Skelton	4.3.24	10	8	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Stainton	26.3.24	10	8	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	The Cottage Wood Centre	17.9.23	9	9	0			
9/9 E Cumbria	Totals			74	11	85	87.06	12.94
9/13 Kendal	Circuit Meeting	21.2.24	16	16	0			
9/13 Kendal	Arnside	5.2.24	6	6	0			
9/13 Kendal	Kirkby Lonsdale	27.2.24	15	15	0			
9/13 Kendal	Levens	19.2.24	6	6	0			
9/13 Kendal	Sandylands, Kendal	1.2.24	14	8	2			
9/13 Kendal	Storth	20.2.24	14	13	1			
9/13 Kendal	Stricklandgate, Kendal	??.2.24	12	9	3			
9/13 Kendal	Totals			73	6	79	92.4	7.6
9/14 S Lakes	Circuit Meeting	30.10.23	18	12	2			
9/14 S Lakes	Ambleside	??.10.23	8	8	0			
9/14 S Lakes	Cartmel	10.11.23	13	12	0			
9/14 S Lakes	Carver Uniting LEP	6.12.23	7	7	0			
9/14 S Lakes	Coniston	17.10.23	6	6	0			
9/14 S Lakes	Grange over Sands	24.1.24	13	9	0			
9/14 S Lakes	(Grasmere - Class of Ambleside)							

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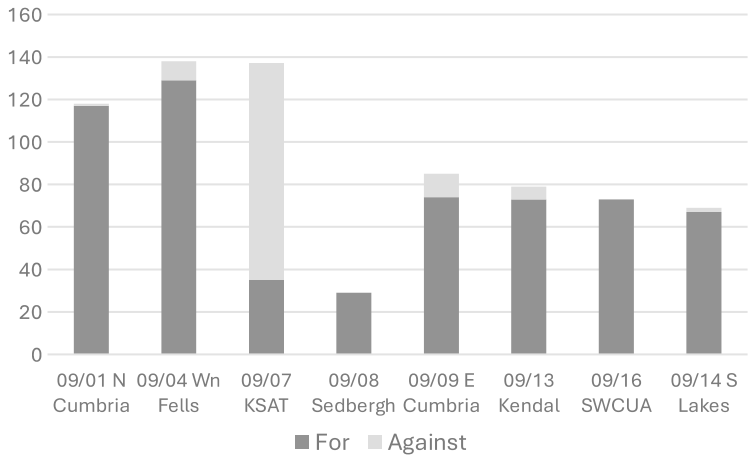
Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
9/14 S Lakes	(Hawkshead - Class of Ambleside)							
9/14 S Lakes	Ulverston	27.11.23	13	13	0			
9/14 S Lakes	(Windermere - Class of Ambleside)							
9/14 S Lakes	Totals			67	2	69	97.1	2.9
9/16 SWCUA	Area Meeting	13.3.24	20	17	0			
9/16 SWCUA	(Askam & Ireleth – Class of Dalton)							
9/16 SWCUA	Beacon Hill, Barrow	22.2.24	11	11	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Dalton Community Church (LEP)	26.2.24	11	7	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Hartington Street, Barrow	5.2.24	7	2	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Kirkby in Furness	1.11.23	6	6	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Millom	7.1.24	9	9	0			
9/16 SWCUA	(Ramsden Street, Barrow - URC)							
9/16 SWCUA	Trinity Centre, Barrow	21.2.24	13	13	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Vickerstown, Barrow	21.2.24	8	8	0			
9/16 SWCUA	Totals			73	0	73	100	0
Overall TOTALS				597	131	728	82	18

APPENDIX 2 – Diagrams of Circuit Voting figures

Total Circuit Meeting & Church Council Votes



Votes for & against by Circuit



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APPENDIX 3 – Letter from the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay Circuit

21st March 2024

To CSCC Meeting. Cumbria DPG
Cumbria District Methodist Synod
The UK Methodist Conference

We, the Church Council Meeting of Orton Methodist Church who met on 28th February wish to make known to the KSAT Circuit Meeting that we are concerned about the proposal of the Circuits within the District of Cumbria to become one single Circuit. Whilst we recognise the need for change, we do not believe that a Single County Circuit is necessarily the right solution.

Our main concerns regarding a Single County of Cumbria Circuit are as follows:

- Rural churches will be much smaller entities in such a large Single County Circuit and therefore their needs and voice may be diminished
- The unique identity of our Circuit may be diluted or even lost if the Circuit expands to a whole County. We have a particular evangelical background and heritage in this Circuit which may be pushed to the margins if we amalgamate with all the other Circuits in the County where priorities may be different
- There are no clear outlines of how finances in the Single County Circuit would play out, e.g. would church assessments increase?
- There is no clear information on how personnel will be stationed – will we have less ministers and paid lay workers?
- An organisation that becomes larger often becomes less effective
- Bureaucracy is likely to increase – getting answers to queries over property, finance etc. may be less easily available, and for example how would a property steward for the Single Circuit, based on the West Coast know the setting, needs and limitations of a small church in the Eden Valley or the Westmorland Dales – part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park?
- Surely there will be a need for more paid roles such as Property Officer, Finance Officer rather than volunteers on the ground in each current Circuit, this surely will put financial strain on all the churches in the County
- Rather than releasing people for mission by having one Circuit, which has been part of the narrative in this proposal, it is apparent that each church will still have to have 12 members to function and all the treasurer, safeguarding, steward and other roles and associated paperwork will still need to be fulfilled. Therefore the congregations of each church may not be released from the many administrative tasks that are required.

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R Woof
Rowland Woof, Steward

J M Bainbridge
John Bainbridge, Property Steward

On behalf of Orton Methodist Church Council

Endorsed by the Newbiggin on Lune Methodist Church
By Stewards Mr Wilf Capstick and Mr Harry Hutchinson by email on Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Endorsed by the KSAT Methodist Circuit Meeting held on Thursday March 21, 2024
Voting In favour 17, against 13, (abstentions 2).

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APPENDIX 4 – Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQ's)

(April 2024 version as presented to the District Synod: updates that were periodically added are in italicised type).

Why are we doing this?

- A desire for a more **missional** shape to our structures, to afford more time for ministry and outreach in each of our communities: centralise the administration, keep the mission and ministry local. *Strong support for economy of scale, share skills, and particularly to concentrate on the mission.*
- To lessen the **burden of governance** and trustee responsibilities with the centralising of those offices that can best be done once by an experienced team, rather than the present duplications with us all having to fend for ourselves with each circuit struggling to recruit lay officers to cover all the roles. *A recognition that we can't survive as we are.*
- Recognition that we have a number of one or two minister circuits. This leads to a lot of **duplication** (of work/meetings) at Superintendent level, and makes it difficult to recruit (as the ratio of Supers to ministers nationally is not 50:50!). *A desire to free up superintendents to use their gifts.*
- A strong desire to maintain the **identity** of Cumbria, within the planned merger of Districts.
- To preserve and help develop our County **ecumenical relationships** and God for All vision.

Why a single county circuit?

- The District Cumbria Circuit Group's assessment is that one Cumbria-wide Circuit is the best option.
- Recognising that most circuits are struggling from one or several perspectives (although assessments about this sometimes vary!), the expectation is that some further mergers amongst the now 8 Cumbrian circuits are likely still to need to happen, and thus we are presently in an ongoing piecemeal process that perhaps should be accelerated to a place of eventual rest. *A desire from many superintendents to **do this once**, rather than take time and energy merging time and time again for years to come.*
- We have considered alternatives, such as merging to form between 3-5 circuits. However, once a circuit reaches the size of a North Cumbria or Western Fells Circuit, the distance from one end of the circuit to the other is such that circuit life and relationships are already different in some respects from the old circuits. To move to a single circuit, rather than to 4-5 circuits, involves, probably, not a big difference.

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*Any alternative to a single circuit involves a number of circuits within the new **Cumbria Mission Area** (that will form part of the new North West England District).*

- Many circuits are already beginning to work together, plus in the new District configuration, a county circuit meeting would **replace the focus that the Cumbria Synod** would have previously offered until August 2024. A Cumbria Circuit would provide a natural means of consulting within the county, that only being the Cumbria Mission Area within the North West England District won't as easily provide. A county circuit would thus also potentially strengthen Cumbria's part within the new District.
- A major reason for moving to a single county circuit would be to **remove internal Methodist circuit boundaries** that mostly do not align well with ecumenical Mission Communities, hindering their development or focus upon them (see more below).
- **Why have we not been offered more than one model to vote on?** – *The Synod appointed the Cumbria Circuit group to consider the possibility of different models.*

The group recommended that only a single Cumbria Circuit model be developed because it combined far greater advantages than any 'half-way house' given the reasoning set out above. The Synod, comprised of representatives of the circuits, agreed with the reasoning and recommendation, and overwhelming agreed that this should be the model consulted upon.

There has still been a choice of two options: a single Circuit, or leaving things as they are with the possibility of further local and bilateral circuit mergers if needed or desired.

- *Won't a **larger organisation** be less effective and more bureaucratic? – Whilst this can of course be true, other examples, including of larger circuits, illustrate that greater efficiency and less bureaucracy can result from removing replication and by the sharing and ensuring of greater expertise through a merger, releasing time and energy to focus on local mission and mutual support.*

What about ecumenical relationships?

- We have consulted and kept our ecumenical partners at county level informed about the possibility. With the movement of District level to the North West (in line with similar Salvation Army and URC arrangements at the equivalent level), moving to a coterminous Cumbria Circuit, Carlisle Diocese (Anglican), and Cumbria Mission Partnership (URC, within their NW Synod), would **facilitate working together**.
- We and our ecumenical partners recognise that removing internal **circuit boundaries** within the county might help the development of Mission Communities. At present Mission Community, Anglican Deanery and Circuit (or United Area)

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boundaries rarely coincide: a few do, but most circuits presently relate to several Mission Communities, hindering engagement. Also, Mission Community mergers are expected in the years ahead, creating further internal boundary changes. Removing the complication of circuit boundaries within the county will help with this, and help to advance ecumenical development, to which the District has long been committed.

- Increasing participation in **Mission Communities** means that, in time, the local Mission Community and its fellowship, meetings and mission, might become the natural organising unit and focus for local Methodist churches in each area. Thus Mission Community meetings might replace circuit meetings as a focus, and removing local circuit meetings would avoid duplication. (Pending reaching that stage of Mission Community development, local sub-area Methodist meetings may be helpful in some places, as suggested below.)
- *It is recognised that Mission Communities are not working well in all areas; a new circuit will need to work with those churches who might work better initially as a section or sub-area than as an ecumenical gathering.*

What will this mean for meetings?

- Experience of county or very large circuits elsewhere suggests that overall the **number of meetings will significantly reduce**.
- The aim is to widen our governance structures so that in some respects they move up a level. The new **Circuit Meeting would be, in size, shape and nature, akin to our current Synod**, meeting perhaps 3 times a year on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon (with tea and an evening service) to cover all the governance matters dealt with by our present circuit meetings, and allowing a focus on mission across the county. (This would reflect an overall movement of structures and upwards and outwards, through a regional district and a county circuit.) Overall, there would also be fewer numbers of circuit committees.
- Some meetings will of course involve more travel for some attendees, but, again, **overall the amount of travel will be reduced** through fewer meetings, together with the use of hybrid and online options where appropriate.
- The current circuit meetings could be replaced by a number of **sub-area meetings** to facilitate local relationships and mutual support, fellowship and outreach (they would not have governance functions). This is not another layer, but a more nuanced differentiation of how and when some meetings might be more business-focused and others might be more fellowship-focused. The need for sub-area meetings may diminish over time with increased participation in Mission Communities, and might also sometimes be impacted upon by the development of **multi-site churches** under single church councils (which in some cases are already partly replacing previous fellowship at circuit level).

What about our minister and lay workers?

- *How will personnel be stationed, and will we have less ministers and paid lay workers?*
- As a rule of thumb, nationally, there is one minister per 150–250 members. So, the **number of ministers** should not be affected by this proposal.
- *The process of ministerial invitations and **stationing** will remain the same, with local churches offering input into the writing of profiles by circuit stewards, and ministers matched via a national process*
- *The number of **youth and family and outreach workers** will remain determined by vision and budget, and ability to support.*
- With the centralisation of administration, it is intended that local ministers, lay workers and churches can focus their efforts on **local mission** and ministry.

What about a Superintendent minister?

- Experience with county or very large circuits elsewhere has suggested that having a **single superintendent** minister with the oversight and leadership of a circuit, rather than a co-superintendency, generally works better.
- *You are likely to **see the superintendent** as often as you currently see the Chair of District for preaching, and a little more often for other things (since a District Chair also has to spend time on national responsibilities).*
- Given that Cumbria will also become a Mission Area within the new NWE District, to be led by a Mission Area Lead/Deputy District Chair, to avoid confusion, the county Superintendent should also be the same person. It would then mean that ecumenical and secular partners, as well as Methodists, would have **clarity as to who the local Methodist county leader is.**
- The single Superintendent must **work collaboratively**, with lay and ordained colleagues, including with a team of perhaps up to 4 Deputy Superintendents (who might be geographically focused, or have a responsibility for a particular function within the new circuit).
- Even with collaborative working and support, it is not anticipated that the Superintendent (with their combined role also as a Mission Area Lead and Deputy Chair) would have capacity to have pastoral charge (or even shared pastoral responsibility for) a congregation: they would probably be a 'separated' Superintendent.
- *It is suggested that current Superintendents will retain their stipend until at least the end of their current period of invitation.*

What about the Circuit Plan and Local Preachers?

- Preachers will usually continue to **preach in their local area**, not around the whole County – much as many do now in sections – and would use the Chrestos Plan-

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making tool to support the Plan-making process, which has proved efficient and effective in other similar contexts.

- There will be a Circuit Local Preachers meeting at county level, including to provide a **critical mass for training** that most present circuits are individually unable to provide. However, some of the time local preachers will still be encouraged to meet locally for fellowship, in a pattern of meetings that will not add 'an extra layer' and probably even out to present frequencies, but with the advantages of both a wider scale and continued local fellowship.
- The proposed model (for preaching, as also will be the case with some other functions) will thus allow local working, whilst keeping oversight, training and provision of some resources at a county level. *Again, it is not the intention to ask Local Preachers to travel further.*

Won't this mean that roles are larger?

- Yes, and no. The numbers of people have declined, so that the new county circuit roles will often be similar in size to circuit roles that were held 30 years ago; overall, we will need **fewer numbers of circuit officers**.
- There may be some roles that will be paid, as we **pool resources** to employ people with expertise to deal with the larger regulatory burden now required under UK legislation. *There are concerns about cost – but the need for people with expertise is there whether we merge or not; a single circuit allows for pooling of resources and economies of scale.*
- Some roles may be shared, including through property and finance committees, enabling people to **share their experience**, rather than relying on one local person to be the expert in everything (e.g. sharing expertise in making our buildings energy efficient), and achieving economies of scale.
- Some may be ready to lay down roles and responsibilities and 'retire', but we hope that some will continue their circuit offering and be stimulated by the new configuration and collegiality; that others may concentrate their service on continuing responsibilities in Local Churches; and that others will use the opportunity to refocus to support ministry and mission in other ways.

Why now, and why implement in September 2025?

- If by the summer of 2024 the decision has been made to move to a county circuit, the **balance of considerations** suggests that implementation would be best in September 2025.
- If the Conference approves in June 2024, there would not be sufficient time to prepare to implement in September 2024. The Standing Order also includes a

provision for the matter to come back to the Conference if necessary for a second time, so we cannot implement before September 2025 anyway.

- Some might prefer a later date (e.g. September 2026), but others want an earlier date because of stationing (e.g. whether to seek a new superintendent or not), or other considerations in their circuits. So, September 2025 represents a compromise, including that the advantage of a longer preparation time does not outweigh the reasons for not waiting as long as until September 2026.
- If there is merit in moving to a county circuit and we can be sufficiently ready by 2025, why wait longer for getting on with it? In particular, if becoming a county circuit helps to preserve the Cumbrian identity and helps engagement in and promotion of the ecumenical county, why delay any more than a year after the inauguration of the NWE District?

Whose decision is it, and what happens if not all circuits agree?

- Ultimately it is the **Conference's decision**, which will carefully consider the views expressed.
- If several circuit meetings and many church councils vote against, the DPG and Synod are likely to be cautious about proceeding or making a **recommendation** to Conference to do so. Alternatively, if there is significant support, a recommendation to proceed is more likely.
- Whatever the final District recommendation, church councils and circuit meetings can make their own **representations** to the Conference (either way). If the Conference judges that its decision "*is substantially out of accord with*" that of a circuit meeting (rather than a church council), the Conference would need to reaffirm its decision the following year in June 2025 (*Standing Order 501(7)*).
- Hopefully, significant **consensus** emerges through the consultation. If in favour, our path forward becomes clearer; if against, further consideration will be required for navigating our present challenges.

What about losing our own circuit's identity?

- Some will naturally be concerned at losing something of their **present circuit identity**, or control over their affairs and resources.
- Our hope is that each part of Cumbria's membership and identity will still be expressed in various ways, through involvement variously in **ecumenical mission communities, multi-site church arrangements, and sometimes sub-area meetings / sections**. *For example, a former circuit meeting may choose to continue to meet: it will no longer have governance and trustee responsibilities (potentially a relief given*

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that many are struggling to continue with or replace key officers), but will have more time and space to concentrate on mission and mutual support.

- In any event, we hope that members from the different parts of Cumbria will feel sufficiently confident in their own voice and identity to play what will be a valued part in the new arrangements.

This will include different theological preferences and voices, in which our commitment as a Methodist Church is that we continue to seek to live well with our sometimes contradictory convictions. Those different perspectives differ but also connect right across the county, more than might presently be realised. A Cumbria circuit might enable appreciation and better connections to be made, whilst sub-area and sectional meetings will still enable local identity and solidarity to be expressed if desired.

- *Will **Rural churches** be much smaller entities in a large Cumbria Circuit, with their needs and voices diminished? – The great majority of congregations in a Cumbria Circuit will be small, of which most will be in rural contexts. The majority of voices in the circuit meeting will be from these contexts. Representation from local churches in the circuit meeting will be able to ensure that the new circuit is attentive to the needs of all the congregations and contexts, collectively working out how to respond to those needs in practice.*

What about finances?

- We hold the **financial, people and property resources** that God has given us as 'stewards' and trustees, not for our own benefit or purpose, but for God's. Methodism is a connexional movement: we are ultimately one big family together, working things out and collectively deciding on the best use of resources for the benefit of God's purposes. This invites an attitude of generously sharing and letting go, that there might be life. However much our instincts might sometimes be to hold onto something, or to be suspicious of what might happen or of how others might decide things, in listening, talking and working things out together, hopefully trust can grow, and become justified.
- *How will **assessments** be calculated? – See the video (<https://youtu.be/b0-T7DvpALY>): it is likely to take account of a number of factors and seek to be fair, with any adjustments taking place over time.*

*There is realistic understanding that the ability in most places to **fund assessments** is diminishing, and at connexional and District levels assessment rises have been held back or reduced out of consideration for circuits and local churches. The representatives from local churches on the new circuit meeting would ultimately have the power collectively to agree or reject proposed assessments, and it will be a common need to ensure that finances are sensible and sustainable.*

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*Experience of large circuits elsewhere suggests that they are better positioned to ensure a **fair assessment level**, and with greater resources to give particular support when justified for congregations who suddenly struggle. If needed, adjustments between the levels from previous circuits, and for the churches within them, have usually been introduced in a sustainable rather than sudden manner, with attention always given to the 'ability to pay', so as to ensure fairness between what are, after all, different groups of Christians.*

We do not yet know whether much adjustment over the next half decade may be required in Cumbria, or not very much at all, but for decades the present Circuit Treasures have been meeting annually, so there is already a long established basis for mutual trust and understanding: we – all members and local churches – would be in this together, concerned for each other's interests, and the furthering of God's mission.

- *How is **funding going to be allocated**? – Decisions about ministry and mission costs and projects will be determined over time by the new circuit meeting (and thus voted on by the representatives of the local churches), considering the overall needs, fairness and priorities. The intention would be to honour commitments given by existing circuits for at least the initial term of those projects and thereafter where possible and still justified.*
- *Will **professional costs** increase assessments? – The level of costs presently being incurred by the circuits would be available where still justified to ensure the effective operation of a Cumbria Circuit. If any additional costs need to be incurred above this level, including over time to support the needs of local churches and such costs are proportionate and justified, the overall available circuit finances would be considered, including from property income and disposals as well as general reserves, in order to provide for any additional costs, rather than seeking to raise church assessments for this purpose. Again, the new circuit meeting will determine these matters, and will be largely composed of local church representatives.*
- *Experience elsewhere has shown that **pooling resources** from constituent circuits can provide more than the sum of the parts: collective reserves levels can overall be lower than the combined reserves levels of many smaller 'pots', or more resources can be pooled to invest in more mission, such as through more (and sometimes more appropriately ambitious) projects and personnel.*

What about local churches?

- *What about **Managing Trusteeship**? – This will remain as defined in CPD, and will sit with the new circuit meeting and existing church councils. There are no planned changes to church councils in terms of a new circuit 'policy' directive (any multi-site church schemes to combine church councils will be a matter of local choice or sometimes necessity according to the principles and processes in Standing Orders).*

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- What about **representation** in the circuit? – this will continue to be via your elected circuit representatives and minister, including for smaller churches.
- What happens to **individual church administration**? – It stays the same, although local church mergers and multi-site church arrangements may address or help with any local concerns.
- If local churches will still need local church roles, how does the proposal help, since they won't be **released** from them? – This is a proposal to reorganise our circuits, to share and reduce the overall amount of roles, processes and administration that is required. Moving from 8 to 1 circuits (even one that will require more to function than a traditional sized circuit) will offer a significant saving. Not as many people will need to double or triple up their responsibilities in church, circuit and district roles. Locally, multi-site arrangements may also help to reduce and share some responsibilities.
- Won't a large circuit be more **remote**, meaning for example that a non-local circuit property steward might not understand or respond as quickly to a local church's problem? – In designing a county circuit's structure, the intention is to ensure that wherever circuit advice or support may appropriately be required can be given as, or more, effectively. This will involve teams sharing skills and pooling knowledge, including of different chapels and contexts. Since several circuits no longer have the necessary local officers or available replacements, the choice may be between a breaking down of the present system, or a new one that has been found to be as or more effective elsewhere.
- Examples of the **larger church resourcing local churches**? – There are examples outside Cumbria of larger congregations supporting smaller ones (with worship, property, finance administration, stewardship etc.) or of circuits helping smaller local causes in specific ways. In Cumbria there are growing examples of multi-site arrangements (e.g. in North Cumbria and Sedbergh Circuits), mutually supporting each other with trusteeship and administration, and sometimes of larger congregations beginning to support smaller congregations in various ways.