

Report from the Connexional Team

MC/24/33

Date of meeting	13-15 April 2024
Contact name and details	Doug Godfrey-Swanney, Connexional Secretary, godfrey-swanneyd@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	To note
Resolutions	33/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To provide the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to <i>Our Calling</i> .
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- 1 At each meeting of the Council the Connexional Team presents a full report on a number of areas of its work. Through this report it is hoped that the Districts and the wider Connexion are able to keep abreast of all that the Team is undertaking on the direction of the Council.
- 2 The Connexional Team continues to meet monthly online where updates and key items of work are shared. Each sub-team has its own regular meetings to consider progress towards items of work that the team is engaged with. There is also a range of meetings for larger items of work to enable cross-team collaboration.
- 3 As indicated in the previous report to the Council, the work of the Team is presented under the four headings of *Our Calling* below.
- 4 The following is the work of the Team since the last report to the Council MC/24/8.

WORSHIP - Ensuring our worship and ministry is effective, relevant and gives glory to God.

- 5 The new book, *We Have Voices: praying together for peace, justice and change*, has been produced. This book was proposed as part of the Justice-seeking Church report as a way of supporting and resourcing preachers and leaders of worship in their prayers for justice. The Revd Dr Barbara Glasson has edited it with prayers from a wide range of contributors. The book is available via the [Methodist Publishing website](#)
- 6 A short animation has been produced sharing how the World Mission Fund is used and how Methodist people can engage as a part of the global Methodist family. This video can be downloaded and used in worship and meetings - www.methodist.org.uk/worldmissionfund
- 7 *Bible Month: reading guide and journaling kit* to complement the main *Bible Month 2024* resource on 'Genesis' has been produced and can be accessed here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/bible-month/>
- 8 The 2023 Advent and Christmas campaign was well received on social media and beyond. Our social media content was seen by more than 1.83 million people, reaching more than 584,700 people on Meta platforms. The main campaign film was viewed almost 350,000 times and has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Charity Film Awards. Methodist Publishing distributed 84,000 free printed products and our digital reflections email list grew by 3,702 subscriptions.
- 9 At the time of writing, we are a few weeks into the Lent campaign and have had a high engagement rate compared with previous Lent campaigns and a good take-up of the resources. Almost 4000 people signed up to do our Lent course which takes the total of people signed up for our Digital

Reflections to 6,500. We started this sign-up for the There is Room campaign in 2022 with just a few hundred sign-ups so this growth is hugely encouraging.

- 10 The new Methodist Church website was launched in mid-March and includes a new church finder tool and a Resource Hub for church service planning and downloads. It has been built on a modern web platform for future development and prioritising accessibility and will accommodate family websites, like the Methodist Heritage website which is launching alongside.
- 11 We continue to support and encourage local preachers and worship leaders through a programme of online training opportunities, and are focusing particularly on equipping people with the skills and confidence needed to plan and lead the increasing number of Local Arrangements.
- 12 The transition of the *Singing the Faith Plus* editor into a direct working relationship with the Ministries Vocations and Worship team (from August 2023) is one feature of the team's work to develop its Worship remit. A cross-Connexion visioning day hosted by the *Singing the Faith* (StF) Reference Group in March 2024 addressed the question of how to develop a shared vision for *Singing the Faith* across the Connexion, to support the Methodist Church in fulfilling the worship aspects of Our Calling. Additionally, the placing of StF-related work within the Ministries Vocations and Worship (MVW) team now underpins increased collaboration with other connexional projects. For example:
 - With Methodist Way of Life initiatives, including service outlines
 - Bible Month – closer cooperation with the development team in 2023 (including participation in the training session) has been followed up in 2024 with the production of the Bible Month StF resource on Genesis. This is the fifth Bible Month resource produced by StF+
- 13 *Singing the Faith Plus* was envisaged at the outset as a 'rolling resource' to support and complement the printed hymn book. It publishes new hymns and songs that the hymn submissions group feels add something to the content of the hymn book in terms of style, theme or written expression. Following a revision of the content and criteria in 2020-21, StF+ now has 127 hymns and songs on the site, with a further ten currently being processed for publication.
- 14 The suggestions of hymns to accompany the lectionary readings are the most popular landing points for site users. In the past year, StF+ has adopted a policy of using these posts to link to other resources on StF+ and elsewhere on the Methodist website.
- 15 A refreshed and engaged StF Reference Group has facilitated new content on the website, often led by Reference Group volunteers or other supporters, eg:
 - Methodist Liturgies are being made available online at StF+
 - Sing All! help sheets to assist congregations to use popular worship songs listed in CCLI's 'top 100' chart of most-used hymns and songs
 - Index of where biblical readings appear in the lectionary
 - Spreadsheet consolidating information about, and cross-referencing, all the hymns in *Singing the Faith*, shortly to be published
- 16 In March, the Ministries team, with the support of a number of lay members, deacons and presbyters from across the Connexion, led two mornings for those considering ordained ministry. These have been well-attended and involved sharing information about the 'Discerning Ordained Vocations' processes, reflecting on what it means to be an ordained minister in the Methodist Church, and the opportunity to talk with those engaged in ordained ministry in many different contexts.
- 17 The Church continues to invest in supervision with some 500 trained supervisors in place. Recent work to enhance the skillset of supervisors included refresher days for those out of practice, a series of upskilling modules on topics as diverse as theological listening & the best use of forms to support the work and an intentional programme for those who support others in developing, and reflecting on, their supervision skills in practice. Mixed teams of employed staff and volunteer facilitators/experts continue to lead on this work. Senior leaders in the Church are supported through external professional supervision. Such supervisors gather to reflect and develop their own skillset convened by the MVW team. The church will undertake a significant piece of research this year that will feed into reporting on supervision to the Conference in 2026.

LEARNING & CARING - We are an inclusive Church

- 18 Over the past year, the Team has taken forward a number of pieces of work in relation to accessibility:

- We continue to respond promptly to requests for communications to be provided in alternative formats (website/intranet/social media), especially for those with particular learning needs. We have begun to add in a standard form of words (in large print) on the back of printed resources that asks people to contact us if someone needs this resource in an alternative format.
 - We also ask people to contact us with versioning and translation requests. We weigh all of these requests up and will provide services where feasible.
 - We have also set up an accessibility page on the Methodist Church website, which brings together resources and how-to guides for accessibility from various sources: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/accessibility/>
- 19 A new process for the payment of expenses is being explored in line with the Justice-seeking Church strategy to ensure that all volunteers, including those who are economically marginalised, can attend Methodist events.
 - 20 The World Mission Fund Grants Committee completed the major work of regional grant decisions in January 2024. The dispersal of these grants is now ongoing with payments in the majority of cases being made in 75% payments to be followed by the remaining 25% payment on receipt of reporting. The total value of grants dispersed is just over £6.3 million (£300K in mission initiative grants and £6 million in capacity building grants).
 - 21 Solidarity grants since January 2024 have been agreed for partners in Chile, following devastating wildfires, and also for Zambia to support the response to the cholera outbreak, and Ecuador in response to the deteriorating security and environmental situation there.
 - 22 Africa Partnership coordinator has had meetings to discuss ongoing partnership work and also attended the partnership meeting for PROMURA (Programme for Christian-Muslim relations in Africa). The Asia and Pacific coordinator has completed visits to the Church of North India and Church of Bangladesh.
 - 23 Pastoral care for all mission partners and particularly employed lay mission partners this year remains a large part of the work for Partnership Coordinators, in response to the Conference's adoption of Notice of Motion 2023/104. This is in addition to the offer of support from outside of the Global Relationships team to all lay mission partners employed by MCB.
 - 24 The team of 13 youth reps was active at 3Generate 2023, managing a number of activities connected to hearing the opinions of the children and young people present. Shortly after 3Generate a new cohort of 16 youth reps was elected. Since then, they have met for one residential weekend and a number of online meetings. They have helped to facilitate the 3Generate Influencer Day in February as well as attend a variety of district youth events. The reps have been involved in developing a new broader and younger Rep Programme to be launched in 2024/2025 connexional year.
 - 25 We have 12 people trained to deliver the Youthscape Essentials Course; three Learning Network staff, nine District Ambassadors and five other colleagues from circuits or district. In addition, the CYF team is offering support to those who want to become trainers and deliver the course in circuit or district setting. More information can be found on the website: [Essentials training for Children, Youth and Family Ministry \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/essentials-training-for-children-youth-and-family-ministry).
 - 26 In March, the Heritage Committee relaunched the Methodist Heritage website. With a modern new design and structure reflecting the Methodist Church's branding to appeal to a wide range of audiences such as heritage tourists, researchers and those looking to share their church's heritage. All the content from the old site was reviewed, updated and migrated plus lots of new content was written and compiled offering inspiring examples from around the Connexion of how heritage can be used for mission. Explore our museums and find details of more than 100 places that tell the story of Methodism. Tell and share stories from Methodism's family histories. Find out how to care for artefacts, where to deposit records and how to search our archives: methodistheritage.org.uk
 - 27 The Archives and Records Advisory Group (ARAG) received a report from a Circuit Archivist that has motivated the group to focus its efforts on providing more structure and support to the network of volunteer Circuit and District Archivists who assist Superintendents to ensure the care and longevity of the records of the Methodist Church in Britain. The newly appointed Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives has been coordinating this effort and a successful grant application for £10,000 from The National Archives was made. The grant will enable the group to produce vital documentation, resources and training to be able to support these archivists and recognise their role.

- 28 ARAG is newly chaired by Charles Forsdick, who has practical and professional engagement with archives throughout his career – Charles is currently the Drapers Professor for French at University of Cambridge. His research and particular engagement with colonial history will be a valuable addition to the work of the ARAG and the Methodist Heritage Committee and its commitment to our global heritage and story.
- 29 The recruitment of the [Solidarity Circles](#) (SC) has been relaunched. The appointments will be made by mid-June followed by the induction for the SC members being completed by September 2024.
- 30 The Director for Inclusion continues to meet regularly with the Director of Evangelism and Growth and the Director of Social Justice and Social Action, to ensure effective collaboration and cohesion between these closely related areas of work.
- 31 We celebrated LGBT+ History Month sharing specially written resources, prayers and blogs on subjects such as the history of inclusion in the Methodist Church and being a trans minister in the Church. Over all platforms, posts with the tag LGBT+ History Month had 30,611 impressions and received 1,412 engagements. The most engaged with post was the first prayer video shared on Facebook with 221 engagements (likes and shares). Posts had an average engagement rate of 5.48% (a good standard engagement rate is between 1-3% so above 3% suggests audiences we reached were much more engaged than usual).
- 32 Our International Women’s Day film which celebrated women ministers in the Methodist Church was seen by over 10k people. This content will be used to celebrate the 50th anniversary in July of the ordination of women presbyters in the Methodist Church in Britain.
- 33 We are filming colleagues in safeguarding as part of an update of their resources and we continue to support churches and Connexional Team colleagues with safeguarding cases that may attract media attention.
- 34 The Who Cares module to support Pastoral Carers has been piloted by the Learning Network to very positive reviews. This will now be developed further for use across the Connexion.
- 35 Translation of the Worship: Foundations training resources into Welsh has been completed and work has commenced on provision of training materials for worship leaders and local preachers in Cantonese to replace the now-obsolete Faith & Worship materials and to support the growing and flourishing Chinese Fellowships.
- 36 The Worship: Leading & Preaching blended learning website now provides an ongoing learning hub to enable all local preachers and worship leaders to log and share their continuing development experiences. Work proceeds to encourage the transformation of Local Preachers’ Meetings into learning communities. Regular online connexional “drop-in” sessions are now provided for Local Preachers’ Secretaries.
- 37 We continue to work with Cliff College to provide learning and development for local lay-pastors (LL-Ps), supporting those currently on the accreditation pathway, reflecting on how we best support the church in equipping LL-Ps. The learning and development pathway is adjusted to each Circuit’s and LL-P’s needs so that appropriate learning opportunities are given for people’s skill and knowledge levels, very important for those who have been in LL-P roles before the office. This approach requires more resourcing, but is key to supporting local settings to appoint people to ministry that meets Circuits’ missional needs. More Circuits are exploring a wider range of patterns of ministry, seeking support from the MVW team and Learning Network; increasingly there are conversations about LL-Ps. The MVW team is exploring how Circuits are supported in conversations to help congregations think differently about what ministry might look like, with more lay and ordained people working collaboratively, providing a great opportunity to release people to use their gifts for mission as part of the ministry of the whole people of God.
- 38 The President of the Conference gives an excellent thought about chaplaincy: “The often unseen work of chaplains is undoubtedly a ‘hidden treasure’ which when uncovered and experienced by those on the receiving end of their listening, understanding and support can be life transforming.” Our work in MVW ensures chaplains are valued and supported, while reminding the church about this ‘hidden treasure’ of ministry. MVW hosted a well-attended online celebration with the President and Vice-President of the Conference, working with a range of partner organisations through the Methodist

Chaplaincy Forum to build chaplaincy capacity, and develop strategies to tell chaplains' stories. So that this work links with church priorities such as the God For All strategy, we are exploring how understandings of discipleship relate to chaplaincy. We hope chaplains feel better equipped to think about discipleship, but can also provide learning about what discipleship looks like beyond church buildings, in varied contexts, adding richness to understanding what fulfilling Our Calling looks like beyond church activities.

- 39 The Ministries team facilitates a number of 'reflection space' residential events to support the wellbeing of ordained ministers. In recent months, these have included 'First Moves in Ministry' for presbyters who are discerning whether to go into stationing after their first appointment, 25+ years in ministry, residential events for those ministers who are going to become supernumerary. Feedback from these have been very positive. In addition, pensions and housing webinars are also held.

SERVICE - We are a justice-seeking Church

- 40 The Connexional Property Support Team (CPST) continues to support connexional property matters and provide advice to ministers, local trustees and circuits more widely. At the update to the Property Development Committee (PDC) in February, it reported that support covered the broad themes of: General developments (11%), developments including a new church building (18%), mission & development (11%), property/portfolio reviews (18%), reordering projects (13%), property management (8%), property sales or leases (11%) and general property advice (5%).
- 41 A key piece of work which continues, and to which most members of the team are contributing, is the development of a new Strategy for Property. The working party was convened at the start of the Connexional year and consisted of representatives of the PDC, District Property Secretaries network, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, Superintendents and Evangelism and Growth colleagues from the Connexional Team. The working group has now met twice, with a full day's workshop in February framed by the working title 'Helping Church through Change – a new vision of property for mission'. The thoughts shared on the day are being compiled into a working framework to inform a third discussion in March, and then a presentation to the PDC in April. This will include a development plan for how this will be taken forward towards a draft strategy.
- 42 The Finance Team has completed the upgrade of the finance system which has moved from an on premise server to a service in the 'cloud'. Work is now turning to look at the other supporting IT systems in Finance, particularly the systems that support fund management and Gift Aid.
- 43 A new Pensions Manager has been recruited and will start in May. In the meantime, the Pensions team has been busy supporting the Pension Trustees with a number of key pieces of work including the valuations of both schemes and the insurance buy-in of the lay pension scheme.
- 44 The Council approved the Justice-seeking Church strategy at its last meeting. Since then a number of pieces of work to help the Church to engage with the Principles, Priorities and Practices for justice have got underway. This includes the first Collaboration Group on one of the Justice Priorities (Climate), co-chaired by Anna Bland and Ian Rutherford, with the aim of building energy, power and awareness within churches. A resource to support engagement with the Principles for justice, through Bible studies, in various accessible forms and accompanied by short films, is being developed, hopefully for launch in autumn. A number of teams are exploring how they can help to deliver justice-seeking within their own strategies, and shared this [film](#) with the wider Connexional Team to introduce this. The Director of Social Justice and Social Action has met with Forces Chaplains, MWIB trustees, probationers and under five groups, district groups and others to explore how they can further embed justice-seeking in their work and ministries.
- 45 In the lead-up to the General Election, the Connexional Team's priority is to campaign for action on poverty in the UK as part of the Let's End Poverty Movement, and to encourage and resource churches and individuals to 'Love, Pray and Vote' – actively and effectively engage in the political process.
- 46 The Let's End Poverty Movement is building momentum to equip communities to raise poverty higher up the political agenda ahead of the upcoming General Election. [You can watch our updates from February here](#). We are using the next few months to help people explore their motivation to tackle poverty and build up local conversations about what change could look like where they are. We have released several resources to empower groups to get involved:

- Act on Poverty – Partnering with Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty and JPIT, we have produced a six week small group course ideal for Lent. Over 1000 people signed up to receive the course, which using bible study, audio recording and video to amplify people on the frontline of poverty response in the UK and globally, and challenge churches to make an action plan for change. [See the resource here.](#)
 - Write to your MP – Almost 4000 postcards have been ordered by local groups (including 20+ Methodist churches and groups) to write to their local MPs and ask them to take action on poverty. Almost 100 people have emailed their MP through our website. This is the first step of encouraging groups to confidently raise poverty with their leaders, and we will follow up with training and resources to arrange meetings with MPs and candidates, and lead and attend hustings events. [You can write to your MP here.](#)
 - [Neighbourhood Voices toolkit](#) – Too often, we hear from the same people at elections, and not normal people in local communities. The Neighbourhood Voices toolkit invites communities in low-income areas to meet together and discuss their hopes, ambitions and challenges, and to record the messages they want to share with political leaders. Let's End Poverty will work with these groups to amplify their voices in political debate using traditional and social media, to build up and platform our collective voice for change.
- 47 The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) has produced an ecumenical guide for churches on holding hustings and other forms of election meetings with candidates, and material on potential questions to ask candidates, complying with electoral and charity law, and preaching and praying during the election period. This can be found at: www.jpit.uk/election
- 48 The Methodist Church has also become an ambassador for a new initiative that will equip local churches to increase democratic participation. The [Voter Registration Champions](#) initiative has been set up by Citizens UK and aims to help organisations to register people to vote, provide information about the need to have appropriate photo ID to vote, and encourage people to vote on polling day. Churches are encouraged to sign up as a way of helping to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and be heard in the democratic process, and to benefit from free support and resources.
- 49 On 22 February, the Methodist Church launched an appeal to raise money for organisations working in Gaza. The Methodist Liaison Office, Jerusalem works closely with the Princess Basma Centre and the Department for Palestinian Refugees which continue to work despite the horrendous conditions in Gaza to provide medical and mental health support, medical supplies, food and fuel to children with disabilities, families and refugees. Further information available at: [Gaza Appeal \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://GazaAppeal.methodist.org.uk) The President and Vice-President released a statement on the same day calling on the UK Government to support an immediate ceasefire. [A Statement from the President and Vice-President on the situation in Gaza \(methodist.org.uk\)](#).
- 50 The Warm Welcome initiative ended at the end of March. A large number of Methodist churches and groups registered as hosting Warm Welcome spaces, offering food, warmth, welcome and friendship to a wide range of people. A short film has been made about the experience of one church in Corby, where the initial Warm Welcome space has grown into a year round community hub, building relationships, and enriching the church. This will be shared shortly on Methodist channels.
- 51 The first meetings of the Global Topic Network conversations on the topic of 'Land Rights' were held in January and February. The meetings initially brought together practitioners and have been chaired by partner's church leaders. The second step will move in to consultation with theologians and the development/sharing of tools for this work.
- 52 Opportunities for volunteering for 3Generate 2024 have now been launched. – for further information about the available roles and sign-up details please visit www.methodist.org.uk/3Genvols
- 53 Tickets for the 3Generate event (4-6 October), will go on sale on 16 April. More information is available at [3Generate \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://3Generate.methodist.org.uk)

EVANGELISM - We are an evangelistic people

- 54 Following the *God For All* report to the 2020 Conference, and after a year-long period of consultation and co-creation with official bodies, teams, and leaders across the Connexion, the Mission Committee is bringing a strategic update report to the Council. The report offers further clarification of the ways in which the 'God For All' strategy is shaping the life, understanding, mission, and witness of the

Methodist Church and its people, especially in the areas of evangelism, pioneering and planting, discipleship, and missional growth and leadership.

- 55 Materials and articles from the Global Relationships team on the work of God around the world have been shared in the Methodist News, Easter Offering, Facebook posts, German Methodist online news, the MCI World Mission Video, the MCB website, the spring edition of Rainbow magazine.
- 56 The Global Relationships team facilitated a member of the Evangelism and Growth team to attend the conference of the Methodist Church in Mexico. This aim of this visit is to enable cross fertilisation of ideas and developing a conversation on shared networks of practice in areas of evangelism and growth.
- 57 Two major exhibitions of the Methodist Modern Art Collection are being staged in the first half of this year:
- *Deepening the Mystery: 'unexpected treasures' of art*, 1 March - 7 April at the Focolare Centre for Unity, 69 Parkway, Welwyn Garden City AL8 6JG. Details of the exhibition can be found [here](#).
 - *New Vision*, 19 May - 13 June 2024 at Emmanuel Church, 48A Upperton Road, Eastbourne, BN21 1LQ. Details of the programme of displays, music, singing, talks and times for reflection will be posted on the [Emmanuel Church website](#) as they are confirmed.

In Closing

- 58 We previously reported that at 25 Tavistock Place we are in the heavy phase of construction following delays in planning approvals coming through from Camden Council. Unfortunately, we have encountered some water ingress issues in this phase which is adding three to five weeks to the programme. We are now looking at September 2024 for the completion on the new Methodist Church House and are working through the impact of this on ourselves and our partners. Decisions around remaining in our current temporary accommodation are under consideration.
- 59 Members of the Senior Management Group attended and participated in the Connexional Leaders' Forum day of reflection, which was held at the beginning of March over 24 hours.
- 60 The Team has supported arrangements and preparations for the Methodist Conference including the registration process, exhibitors and fringe event applications.
- 61 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.

***RESOLUTIONS

33/1. The Council receives the report.