

Report from the Connexional Team

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	To Note
Resolution	15/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to the Methodist Council Objectives.
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1. This report provides the Council with an update on work in the Connexional Team that relates to the Methodist Council Objectives.
2. One exciting development to report other than the work towards the objectives is that we are really pleased to have welcomed Aileen Fox as Chaplain to Methodist Church House. Aileen has shared at a Connexional Team Meeting and led prayers at the Team's Carol Service as part of her introduction to the Team.

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

3. At the last Council meeting, the Council asked for further information on work being done to encourage and equip more people into ministry. Some of the actions that have been in development over the past two years include:
 - There is now one programme content for Exploring Ordained Ministry days, for in person events and online events, which will be led in part by the Ministries: Vocations & Worship team (M:VW) and in part by the Learning Network. The programme ensures consistency of content and tone.
 - 119 people attended the M:VW-led Exploring Ordained Ministry Days over the previous two years.
 - A series of 14 reflective postcards are due to be released that relate to 13 forms of vocation within church life. Each one has an image that can be used as an aid to reflection and contemplation, whilst engaging with any of the discernment questions on the reverse. Each postcard links to the website to help people explore their next vocational steps. They will be available from Methodist Publishing.
 - Films have been made of a diverse range of local preachers sharing why they 'love being a local preacher'. These are on the website and will be used in #LoveThisCalling campaign (research shows that when there are a group of local preachers in training from one place candidating numbers increase – this trend is being further explored by the Officer for Worship and Local Preachers).
 - A new vocations campaign #LoveThisCalling will run from January 2021 to May 2021. This is a festival and celebration of vocation. The campaign will build up to Vocations Sunday on 2 May, with follow on Human Library event for those who are exploring a calling within church life. This

campaign is a partnership between the Connexional Team, Twelvebaskets (and The Vine) and Singing The Faith+.

- A new vocational reflection booklet is being devised for churches to distribute.
 - Vocations is now embedded into workplans across the Connexional Team including: Communications team, Children, Youth & Family, Learning Network, Evangelism & Growth, Global Relationships, Armed Forces Chaplaincy, and of course M:VW.
 - The December focus of the Mission and Ministries round table was vocations, and there are other cross-team groupings working together.
 - An increasing numbers of Districts now have intentional vocations strategies.
 - The Inclusive Church strategy, God for All strategy and Developing Vocations strategy lead staff are working together as each one is interdependent on the others.
 - We are gathering learning from 'sending' churches, circuits, and districts with intentional vocations strategies, along with conversations with churches with a desire to increase the confidence of BAME leadership. All of this will form the basis of a new light-touch resource to enable churches, circuits and districts to be strategic about creating a culture to enable vocational exploration.
 - There is a clear direction for this work to move forward, which will run across a two-year project if funding is secured for an officer.
4. The Ministries Committee will consider further emergency measures to help increase numbers of candidates for ordained ministry at their February meeting and will report to the Council in due course.
5. Work around the candidating process continues which includes:
- A Candidating Review is underway with a representative and diverse group.
 - Candidates Selection Committee training has taken place and included resilience assessments as well as considering the theology of discernment and calling.
 - There are 31 candidates (29 presbyteral, 2 diaconal) in this year's process.
 - All 14 Ministers from Other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs) arrived to serve in our Connexion this autumn. They and their circuits have shown great resources of grace, patience, faith and generosity.
 - We are expecting a large number of MOCC new applications in January (for people who would start from September 2022).
 - Plans for ordinations are progressing for April (for the 2020 cohort) and June. We are planning at the time of writing that these will be full services but we are also making contingency plans for COVID restrictions.

6. Worship resources on the presidential theme from a global perspective have been produced and are available for accredited preachers and for those responsible for leading an 'Own Arrangement Service' on the Global Relationships pages of the website.
7. We continue to develop our support for Positive Working Together, working in partnership with Place for Hope to establish a regular programme of training for trainers, network days for trainers and practitioners and refresher days for trainers. A programme of dates has now been agreed for the remainder of 2020-21 and this will be updated for 2021-22 in due course. ([Positive working together \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk))
8. Work is underway to develop our online learning presence, working in partnership with Cliff College, utilising the Theology X platform. Over the course of 2020-21 we will be establishing and piloting online learning in the following areas:
 - Church Stewards
 - Circuit Stewards
 - Safeguarding (working with the Safeguarding team)
 - Introduction to Methodism
 - Unconscious Bias
 - Line Management
 - Theological literacy
 - Children, Youth and Families (through the CYF team)

A Church for all people/ The Inclusive Church

9. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Adviser continues to take forward the work of the 'Inclusive Methodist Church' strategy. A recent recruitment exercise for volunteers to help shape the strategy and the associated work streams resulted in an additional 17 people from across the Connexion joining the existing five work stream areas. A recruitment advertisement for an 'EDI Implementation Officer' will shortly be launched, with shortlisting expected mid-January and interviews taking place in early February 2021.
10. The Communications team worked with the EDI Adviser and other members of the Connexional Team to produce material to celebrate Black History Month in October. In addition, there were weekly podcasts hosted by Bevan Powell with guests such as Professor Anthony Reddie and the Revd Arlington Trotman and one organised and recorded by the Children, Youth & Family team. We also produced blogs, prayers and highlighted events taking place. Our next joint venture will be for LGBT+ History Month in February. We have also redesigned the Inclusive Church webpages to make them easier to use and to give them a more contemporary feel.
11. The Connexional Team has set up a small task group to consider how the Inclusive Methodist Church strategy applies to the life of the Team. The group is looking into kite marks of inclusive organisations as a benchmark to identify further actions for implementation in the Team.
12. The Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) pilot project, in partnership with Place for Hope, is now underway and Katie Bradley, Project Manager with Place for Hope, is making good progress in establishing the initial work for the project. The project seeks to offer a team of accredited practitioners to work across the pilot regions of North West & Mann, Eastern and London to offer reconciliation and mediation as appropriate into situations of conflict. The work links in closely with the review of our Complaints and Discipline (Part 11 of Standing Orders), and is involving District Chairs, District Reconciliation Groups (DRGs), local complaints officers, and learning network teams in the pilot regions. The project is also establishing links with Ministries, Vocation and Worship team and the work on The Inclusive Methodist Church.

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

13. The Team continues to support this objective by the work of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) and also through the Agents of Change initiative from the Children, Youth & Family team.
14. The Communications team has worked alongside JPIT to achieve media coverage for an open letter to the Chancellor, signed by the President and Vice-President, highlighting household debt. It was featured in an article in the Guardian online and Observer newspaper as well as on radio stations in the following days: <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/dec/05/exploitation-of-the-poor-borders-on-evil-say-clerics-driven-to-tears-by-debt-crisis>
15. Plans for a global Methodist campaign in the lead up to the 2021 COP26 proceed, with young people now employed in Fiji, Italy, Zambia, Uruguay and Britain. They are working with volunteers from Russia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and hoping to expand to volunteers from Switzerland, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and the USA. The campaign is due to be launched in spring 2021.
16. There are now four COP26 team members from each of the four global regions who are working with two team members from the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) in leading a Methodist response to the upcoming summit; the Global Relationships Committee have agreed to the extension of funding for the posts it is responsible for, given the postponement of COP26.
17. The [Reset The Debt](#) campaign was launched to highlight the household debt crisis in Britain and to call for a Jubilee Fund to cancel unpayable debts. Within a fortnight, over half the members of the House of Commons received a letter about the campaign from constituents, and more recently nearly 500 church leaders from 10 denominations wrote a letter to the Chancellor calling for action on household debt. Campaign actions continue, with plans for a roundtable, chaired by the Bishop of Durham, in January 2021. Publishing was proud to support JPIT's 'Reset the Debt' campaign by producing the (pdf) report published in September. This is being updated to accommodate changes due to the second lockdown and the extension of the furlough.
18. The UN Treaty for Prohibition for Nuclear Weapons was ratified in October 2020 and will come into force in January 2021. The Treaty had been supported by many faith groups, including the Methodist Church, from its early days. JPIT re-released a [campaign film](#) supporting the Treaty to mark the occasion.
19. The [EU Settled Status](#) resource was produced to help support people applying for the EU Settlement Scheme, working with the charity Settled.
20. Representatives from the Methodist Church, together with the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church, met with Colin Bloom who is leading the Government's Independent Enquiry into Faith Engagement.
21. The new season of the [Faith in Politics podcast](#) began, with new hosts Meg and Rodney, with interviews with Shane Claiborne (US activist and author) and Ben Lindsay (Author, *We need to talk about race*).
22. JPIT supported campaigning to call on Nestle to keep the KitKat brand Fairtrade, through supporter mobilisation and direct stakeholder lobbying. Whilst the [campaign](#) was unsuccessful a deal of engagement was achieved.
23. The Methodist Church has joined the [Gambling Health Alliance](#) and has spoken out about the Government's review of gambling.

24. The Agents of Change initiative aims to inspire and equip children and young people to be activists, volunteers, campaigners, peace-makers and project-starters. This year we started a pilot group – our Green Agents of Change – and we are hoping to continue to grow and develop this community.
25. Agents of Change overlaps with other key pieces of work, such as the growth of our team of Social Justice Youth Reps, representation from the Children, Youth and Family Team on key Methodist steering groups (eg the COP26 Campaign), the development of the Youth President's *God's World Our Home* resource and 3Generate/3Generate 365.

Evangelism / God For All

26. The implementation of the God for All strategy continues to be a key priority for the Connexional Team in supporting this objective alongside the #GodsWithUs presidential theme and the work towards *A Methodist Way of Life*.
27. *God for All*, the Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth, started officially in September at the beginning of the new connexional year with the launch of a focused *Year of Prayer*, which includes a weekly online prayer service led by diverse lay and ordained leaders. These midday services, with accompanying British Sign Language interpretation, attract hundreds each week with an eventual reach of several thousand as the service is shared and engaged on social media.
28. In the first four months of the strategy, each of God for All's eight core areas has launched significant programmes, some of which are mentioned below:
 - *Centred in God* - 250,000 commitment cards for *A Methodist Way of Life*, a set of focused discipleship practices for individuals and churches, have been distributed widely across the Connexion and a suite of accompanying resources is available online and in print.
 - *Everyone an Evangelist* - A newly-designed *Evangelism for Leaders* course will be offered four times in 2021, with hundreds of people already booked in. Recognising that our leaders are critical to being an evangelistic church – and in modelling the way we as a diverse people are called to evangelism, the course aims to equip leaders in their contexts to prioritise and promote evangelism and a culture of confident, authentic faith sharing.
 - *Transformational Leadership* - The *Transformational Leadership Learning Community* (TLLC) is a one- to three-year programme of teaching, reflection and coaching that equips Methodist leaders with the skills and confidence to bring about transformation in their own contexts. Teams of lay and ordained leaders from the same church or circuit commit to learn, plan, act and reflect together over a sustained period of time to help make their dreams a lived reality. After a pilot year in 2020 with 45 people in eight teams, thirteen teams are already booked in to start the journey in 2021.
 - *New Places for New People & Church at the Margins* - In 2020/2021, ten District Chairs and District teams are joining with Evangelism and Growth team staff in a year-long design process to discern, envisage, and plan project proposals for starting new Christian communities across the circuits of their Districts. Over the next three years, every District will be invited into this mutual, generative process. This consultative, contextual approach to pioneering and planting is meant not only to help each District prepare well but also to unleash new learnings for mission and ministry with unaffiliated people.
 - *Every Church a Growing Church* - A simple and practical eight-step process to guide churches or circuits through the task of discerning and writing a helpful and effective mission plan has been

designed and is available online. It is supported by the Mission Planning Toolkit, which explains each step and signposts useful resources, and the Mission Planning Workbook - a free download that goes into each step in more depth.

- *Young Evangelists, Pioneers, and Leaders* - A partnership is underway with the Children, Youth, and Family team to expand the One Programme, including planning for a significant increase in vibrant residencies/site placements for young people exploring leadership in disciple-making, evangelism, and pioneering and planting.
 - *Digital Evangelism* - #GodIsWithUs, the Methodist Church Christmas 2020 digital evangelism campaign shared good news through twenty-four written stories of individuals and their experiences of this extraordinary year. Local church engagement with #GodIsWithUs was at overwhelmingly high and extremely positive levels, demonstrating the wisdom of carefully-planned series of high-quality pieces of digital content which are scheduled to appear over a defined period of time and which lead to dramatically increased contact with new people.
29. The Communications team is working closely with the Evangelism and Growth (E&G) team to promote the work of *God For All* by supporting the weekly Year of Prayer event and working closely with E&G and colleagues in the publishing team to produce the Methodist Church's Christmas Campaign. This, #GodIsWithUs, has had a huge response on social media. Our launch film which was produced jointly between communications and E&G and has contributors from the wider Methodist family, had over 70k views on Facebook and Twitter in the first week.
30. As part of the Christmas campaign, the Head of Mission suggested the production of a #GodIsWithUs Christmas service for those unable to get to church this year. The Communications team worked with the Heads of the Mission and Ministries teams to create a running order which included representatives of our wider family including the West London Mission and MHA. We offered it as a CD as well as a downloadable resource and after starting with an initial print run of 2500, we were inundated with orders and ended up needing 19,000 CDs, a phenomenal response. We have heard of circuits who have ordered them to give to every household and people who were looking forward to listening to a resource like this rather than having to log on to watch online.
31. In 2020/2021, the introduction of the Methodist Way of Life will be supported by a series of resources, beginning with the *Commitment Cards* made available for all our members with their membership tickets, and now available online [in 13 language versions](#). Next came [A Brief Guide to a Methodist Way of Life](#) introductory booklet (also for all of our worshipping congregations), and [Finding the Way](#), an A5 study guide, ordered by circuits, supporting the practice of *A Methodist Way of Life* and related to Our Calling, and which is supported by [Preparing the Way](#) – an online-only pdf with PowerPoint slides, offering options for introducing *A Methodist Way of Life* to groups in one to four sessions. It draws on *Finding the Way* and other resources for *A Methodist Way of Life*. Also in development are: *Proclaiming the Way*, 12 online-only sermon outlines to help preachers promote the principles of *A Methodist Way of Life* in worship; and a pack of *Conversation Cards*, with questions and charming, detailed illustrations, to stimulate discussion about our discipleship in small group, young people's and intergenerational settings. Currently, the E&G and Publishing teams are preparing a second tranche of materials, eg, *Evangelism Pathways*, to be available from mid-January 2021.
32. The first evangelist to be appointed through our partnership with CIEMAL (the Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean) is now in place and has begun work in the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne District.

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

33. There is a number of pieces of work in the Team in furtherance of this objective about the Resources for the Church including Oversight & Trusteeship, Vocations, developments in our Safeguarding processes, and the work of the Children, Youth & Family team to encourage young leaders.
34. The team in the Conference Office is continuing to support all the processes and meetings around Oversight and Trusteeship following the 2020 Conference.
35. They are also preparing for the Conference in 2021, and working on the basis that the Conference will meet physically in Birmingham as planned.
36. Pastoral Supervision is now being rolled out for all ordained Mission Partners.
37. The Government and Charity Commission have now confirmed that the Charities (Exception from Registration) Regulations will be extended for ten years, until 31 March 2031. Methodist charities with gross annual incomes under £100,000 in England and Wales are 'excepted' from registration with the Charity Commission. You can find out more information here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/finance/charity-registration>.
38. A new Domestic Abuse Policy is before the Council for approval at this meeting and in November we held an extremely well attended webinar (500 attendees) on the subject of how the church can respond with the increase of reported incidents during the lockdowns. The webinar included contributions from the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Conference, and from the Government's newly appointed Domestic Abuse Commissioner.
39. A new publication from the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group addressing the *Our Calling* themes from a survivor's perspective is being published alongside a leaflet for all churches that can be used to encourage survivors to come forward if they wish to speak to anyone in confidence in their church.
40. As restrictions due to the pandemic have continued we will be able to start running a new online version of the safeguarding training Foundation Module in January and work is being finalised to make the Advanced Module also available for online learning.
41. There is a range of work on the subject of vocations being carried out by the Connexional Team and our partners which includes:
 - Methodist Pioneer Pathway
 - Evangelism pathways
 - Transformational Leadership programme
 - Leadership Year for young adults
 - OPP and Rep alumni pilot – to offer ongoing support to young adults who have shown existing leadership skills
 - Cliff College Year
 - Youth Reps
 - Youth President
 - 3Generate volunteers offered vocational exploration support
 - ONE programmes
 - Candidate support programmes
 - Discernment course
 - Armed forces chaplaincy vocation journal

- Singing the Faith + - identifying vocational hymns for 14 weeks to be available as videos for use in online worship. StF newsletter has 3,718 subscribers and the website has an average of average 2,025 views per week
 - The Vine including a 'What are you being called to?' section of the service. This resource has 11,000 people on its mailing list and between 3,000 and 4,000 downloads each week.
42. The Engagement team is collaborating with the M:VW team on resourcing the [Vocations](#) campaign throughout spring 2021, including with updated web pages and *Called to Be* postcards.
43. 3Generate 365 aims to be a year around engagement with children and young people across the Connexion. It is a strategic approach in enabling participation of children and young people locally and in 3Generate the event each year. This year 365 carries a theme of "Tune in" encouraging children and young people and the whole church to 'Tune into God'. There are a number of resources that are available to support churches engaging in 3Generate 365:
- **3Generate 365 Toolbox** for group leaders, with downloadable resources, zoom gatherings and webinars.
 - **Voting Matters resource**, to help leaders have conversations with children and young people about the 3Generate elections.
 - We launched a new **3Generate app** that can download onto phones and tablets which allows children and young people to engage directly with the content of 3Generate 365 and 3Generate the event.
 - **"Tune ins"** - live events presented by Youth President, Phoebe Parkin, engaging children and young people live and online. Our first was in November with over 300 children and young people watching live and we plan a second for the end of January. The Tune in will continue throughout 2021.
 - A weekly time of prayer called **Tune In to God: Fridays@5:17**. The Youth Reps chose the time 5:17 because 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says 'Never stop praying'.
 - **District Ambassadors** to support local churches to engage with 3Generate 365 and 3Generate the event.
44. We are hopeful that 2021 will again allow us to create a face to face 3Generate event at the end of October. To this end we have set up Satellite groups in order to plan the 2021 programme. These Satellite groups will be run by volunteers and co-ordinated by the Children, Youth & Family team but will include and draw input from children and young people's groups from across the Connexion with the help and support of the District Ambassadors.
45. *Creating Space with Children – webinar series* - Developing new approaches to ministry with children has proved extremely timely this year during the pandemic when restrictions have made it virtually impossible to meet as previously. *Creating Space with Children* is a learning journey that seeks to explore ministry and new ways to be with children through gathering with others of all ages. It takes place virtually over four sessions, offering participants the opportunity to gather with others to learn and reflect together on how ministry with children in both peer and intergenerational settings can nurture the spirituality and faith formation of all involved. We are facilitating this as ecumenical initiative working together United Reformed Church, St Albans and Oxford Dioceses, and *Roots for Churches*.

46. In September 2020, the first cohort joined the pilot of *The Leadership Year*. The aims of which include to raise up and support younger Christian leaders (18-30), to be leaders both within and outside the Church, and to create and grow a sustainable community of young adults across the Connexion. We currently have 22 participants, who for this pilot year are from the One Programme, Young Adults' Vocations Programme and the Cliff Year. The original plan was to hold four residential weekends over the year. Due to lockdown restrictions this had to be swiftly adapted to be delivered online. The participants are all in leadership roles in placements and are sharing and learning skills in a Mission- based context.
47. The *connexion* magazine continues to be a vibrant source of stories of continuing mission across the Church. However, in response to the restrictions due to COVID-19, since March 2020 there have been no bulk deliveries of the magazine to churches, and just single issues mailed to named households. This reduction in the print quantity, but also in the corresponding opportunity to share copies of the magazine with church visitors and neighbours, is being kept under review, issue by issue, supported by stronger promotion of the online version.
48. We have agreed a discount for all Methodist churches with a Christian company that provides 'contactless giving' technology. As part of this agreement, the company are also providing free on-line donation webpages for all churches <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/finance/webpage-for-online-donations>.
49. The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for trainers project is progressing well following a delay due to the COVID-19 situation and MHFA England's capacity and initial ability to deliver the training in an online environment. We now have a cohort of 12 people who will be trained as trainers during this connexional year. The intention will be to establish a regular training programme across the connexion from early next connexional year. As part of the development of this work, in partnership with HR and Wellbeing, we are also able to offer the initial MHFA two day course to both the cohort of trainers (a pre-requisite) and up to 15 Connexional Team members. This will enable us to offer better MHFA support across the Connexion.

Responding to the Gospel in partnership

50. The Assistant Ecumenical Officer has worked with the Inter Faith Network and others to promote Inter-faith week in November. This included piloting partnership between Methodist churches and mosques and a letter of greeting from the President and Vice-President extending friendship to brothers and sisters of all faiths. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/presidency-marks-inter-faith-week-with-letter-celebrating-friendship>.
51. The Assistant Secretary of the Conference is working with the Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum to produce an ecumenical strategy for the next 3 years and to refresh the membership and purposes of the Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum.
52. The past months have not been easy for our partners at Cliff College and The Queen's Foundation. We are grateful for the open and honest conversation between the institutions. The Ministries team through the Director of Learning for Ministry (Jonathan Dean) continues to work closely with the learning institutions.
53. Grant giving from and fundraising for the World Mission Fund are being reviewed as the fund reaches reserve levels; a consultation with Partners is to be developed to consider the sharing of resources and mutual learning for the benefit and growth for all, and our future partnership in the Gospel.

54. Six Mission Partners and two Accompanying Volunteers have been accepted for training, and £573,779 was given to support global Partners in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In closing

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

*****RESOLUTION**

15/1. The Council receives the report.