

Report from the Connexional Team

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	To Note

Summary of Content

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

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

2. The Team continues to support this objective in a range of ways including facilitating training for worship leading and preaching, providing worship resources, supporting vocations, offering training to support ministry, and engaging with worship alongside our global partners. This includes continuing to make available worship at home materials for those unable to attend in person or online church.
3. In collaboration with Cliff College, we continue to develop *Frontline*, a forum for young preachers and evangelists.
4. The Ministries team continued to work in collaboration with the Ministries Committee to offer guidance and systemic change in relation to ministerial flourishing and well-being.
5. Vocations materials have been published these include a small journal aimed at all congregations to help people reflect on their own callings, a set of postcards to help people reflect on roles in church life (these now include the vocation of Local Lay-Pastor), and a resource for leaders to be intentional about developing vocations.
6. The Christmas Service on a CD is being produced and will be available in November.
7. The Learning Network working closely with the Ministries team continues to offer training and ongoing support for tutors and mentors in *Worship: Leading and Preaching*.
8. The Learning Network alongside the Evangelism & Growth and Ministries teams are once again planning to offer a Connexion-wide approach to Bible Month this year. This is seen as part of enhancing worship and developing biblical literacy
9. The Global Relationships team has produced Worship Resources – a service for authorised preachers, with comments on the readings suggested, and a stand-alone service for Local Arrangements. Both have accompanying PowerPoints and there are two short films. Based on the presidential theme from a global perspective they draw on materials and prayers from Partners, Mission Partners, the President and Vice-President.
10. Much of the Safeguarding Team’s time has been taken up by participation in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The Inquiry will deliver its final report next year and the Team continues to review our policy and practice. As part of the preparation for this the

Safeguarding Committee has recommended to the Council a new system of district safeguarding audit that can be undertaken over a four year rolling programme.

A Church for all people/ The Inclusive Church

11. The Ministries team is working on a *voices of identity* project enabling groups of ministers to create support bubbles and safe spaces to engage theological discussion. This will include a group for ministers from the global majority (BAME).
12. The Communications team has been working alongside the EDI team to develop bespoke content for Black History Month in October. This content will focus on black leadership within the Church and wider society, and includes the Methodist Youth President in conversation with Lord Boateng.
13. The Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) pilot project had a successful e-launch during the Methodist Conference. All three Learning & Development Coordinators in the pilot regions are exploring, with the Project Manager, the opportunity for regional events and how best to proactively promote the service during 2021/22. A cohort of 20 has successfully completed their initial training and accreditation as practitioners in supporting the project within the three learning network regions. The Place for Hope team continue to work well together with the Director of Regional Learning and Development to deliver the initial objectives for the project.
14. The 2021 Conference affirmed Resolution 29/4: *“The Conference reaffirms the importance of hearing the voices of children and young people in discerning future direction and directs the Council and connexional committees, when revising strategic policies, to ensure that there is consultation with under 12s, under-18s and under-23s as well as with other groups.”*
A number of actions are underway to ensure this resolution is upheld, including:
 - The Conference Office is revising Council and Connexional Committee report templates and will include a reference to this resolution in those templates.
 - The Conference Office will also explore how a reference to this resolution could be incorporated into the induction of new Council and committee members.
 - The Youth President Role Review task group are committed to referencing this resolution in the revised job description that they will commend to the 2022 Conference.
 - Phoebe Parkin, Youth President 2020/2021, contacted Council and Connexional Committee chairs in August to draw their attention to this resolution and ask for their support in upholding. Daud Irfan, Youth President 2021/2022, will write to committee chairs again in October.
15. **3Generate Children and Youth Assembly:** the residential event will take place at the NEC at the end of October as originally planned with day visitors. The programme, designed and planned by volunteer groups that include young people, will challenge participants to pray, listen and discern together under the theme; ‘Tune In to God’. A new 4-7 year old’s 3Generate day event is also being piloted.
16. Children Youth and Family Ministry support has been extended through a toolbox of resources for churches. These include downloadable resources and a series of Zoom Gatherings and Webinars.
17. A Users’ Guide to the JDS Strategy has been produced which will be out by the beginning of November with the aim of engaging as many Methodists as possible with the vision for this strategy. It is not intended to explain everything in the report, but to get everybody onto that first ‘rung’. The EDI toolkit has been updated and the new version (to be called the EDI Handbook) will be produced for the next Connexional year. An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced and will be piloted before being shared across the Connexion

18. The Discrimination Response System and Personal Responsibility Covenant will be piloted in the Birmingham and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury districts before the next Conference. Solidarity Circles are beginning to be set up for different 'communities of shared experience'. The first one is 'Living with Disability'. Information about this will be available soon inviting all Methodists to join these for mutual support, but also to support the Connexion in listening and learning from the experience of those Methodists who we have been excluding or marginalising.

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

19. One of the two British COP26 and all of the four global **COP26 Workers** are being financed from the World Mission Fund. The global COP26 team are producing monthly resources to support the campaign theme, 'We believe in climate justice for all.' A global network of volunteers has been built up to support the team, which is in partnership with organisations such as the World Methodist Council.
20. The **Walking with Micah**: Methodist Principles for Social Justice project was launched in June with the first Methodist Justice Lecture given by former Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon Brown. The project will explore what it means to be a justice-seeking church. Over the next two years it aims to encourage Methodists to live our calling to seek justly, help the Methodist Church discern its role and voice in key issues, and increase our effectiveness in acting for justice. It will do this through: listening to those with experience of injustice; learning from our theology and heritage; conversations with Methodists about what they doing and caring about today; joining our concerns with those of the wider Methodist family; encouraging the sharing of effective models of acting for justice; and articulating our shared principles, priorities and practices for justice. In addition a report will be brought to the Conference 2023. More information, including a short film, resources and the chance to sign up to a monthly newsletter can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/walking-with-micah/
21. The Joint Public Issues Team has supported the Trussell Trust's "**Keep the Lifeline Campaign**" against the planned cut of £20 from Universal Credit including holding meetings with Ministers, MPs and the media on the issue.
22. As part of the campaign on the cut to **International Aid**, JPIT encouraged church members to write to their MP and promoted statements from senior church leaders. Supporters were encouraged to engage with popular brands over their use of cotton from China as part of a campaign on the forced labour of Uyghur Muslims in Xinxiang, China.
23. The Christmas campaign material has been developed under the title 'Great joy for all the people'.
24. The **Reset the Debt** campaign was successful in initiating and coordinated a backbench debate in the House of Commons, working with a cross party group of MPs. As part of the campaign meetings were held with Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions ministers to discuss the issue of debt. In conjunction with the HeartEdge network a webinar was hosted. The team co-ordinated a day of prayer and action including a prayer webinar with MPs and church leaders. JPIT provided a written response to treasury select committee call for evidence on post COVID economy.
25. JPIT submitted a response to the **New Plan for Immigration Consultation** on behalf of JPIT's churches, and has begun campaigning on the Nationality and Borders Bill, including joining the Together with Refugees coalition. Work has continued with UK Nuclear Weapons Financing Research Group facilitating a webinar and a letter writing campaign.

26. The **Beckly Lecture** was organised and promoted with Prof. Jason Leitch speaking on 'Faith and leadership in a global pandemic'. JPIT have responded to the requests from the Methodist Conference, including drafting letters to the government on COP26 and International Aid.
27. JPIT have created resources for **Season of Creation** 2021 in partnership with Eco Congregation Scotland and met with farmers and members of rural communities in a roundtable meeting, alongside the rural officer.
28. Alongside the continued publication of the daily 'Stay & Pray' posts, the monthly newsletter, regular blogs and the Faith in Politics Podcast, JPIT have begun a new weekly, lectionary based, resource '**Politics in the Pulpit**'.
29. In 2021/22 the Children, Youth and Family team with input from JPIT will facilitate five pilot **Agents of Change** roadshows events, working with regional partners across the country. These events will be aimed at children and young people, aged 8 to 16, and their workers. Each roadshow will explore a different aspect of being an Agent of Change aiming to help children and young people to understand how the Christian faith, their own discipleship and their work as Agents of Change are interwoven equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in their work as Agents of Change in their churches, communities and the world.

Evangelism / God For All

30. A Digital Training Officer has been recruited to work closely with the Director of Digital Engagement, Evangelism and Growth, Communications and Learning Network teams to develop and deliver training in digital communications across the connexion and support the development of our online learning Theology X platform.
31. The invitation to the whole Church to **engage with the God For All strategy** in a way that resonates with their contexts has been communicated broadly through:
 - the publication of Take Your Next Steps in Evangelism and Growth, a free digital and/or paper guidebook to God for All's opportunities link: www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/explore-the-god-for-all-strategy/
 - a 2021 Conference video update and follow-up article in the Connexion magazine Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyXMRZqPF_w&t=38s
 - updated webpages related to God for All Link: www.methodist.org.uk/evangelism/
 - numerous Synod presentations and workshop
 - the expansion of active, creative social media streams
32. Additionally, the Evangelism and Growth team has responded to the invitation of many circuit superintendents to present God for All introductions at circuit meetings or circuit leadership meetings and to listen deeply to the gifts and challenges of each circuit – and has now offered such a presentation/listening session to every circuit over the next 18 months, with 10% of circuits already booked in. For more information, contact evangelism@methodistchurch.org.uk.
33. **Centred in God:** www.methodist.org.uk/mwol/
 The **Year of Prayer** online prayer meetings during the connexional year 2020/2021 were a celebration of God's presence with us, involving the gifts and guidance of leaders extremely diverse in context, theology, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ordained and lay. The weekly meeting was one of the most engaged pieces on the Methodist Church's social media for the year. A final service of celebration presented testimonies from the year and connected local leaders to resources for praying in their communities.

34. A **Methodist Way of Life** resources have been published and promoted across the Connexion, and the strategic embedding of MWOL as a practical way to live out *Our Calling* is well under way. Following the conclusion of the original MWOL design group that met for three years to consult and design MWOL, a new MWOL Implementation & Strategy group has been set up to review progress and to explore how MWOL can be used effectively in pioneering and planting projects, with young people and in intergenerational Christian community, digital discipleship, ordained ministerial wellbeing, and more. Intergenerational Conversation Cards and worship resources have been produced, after consultation with CYF and Learning Network staff, for churches to explore the Methodist Way of Life.
35. **Everyone an Evangelist:** www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/
The new **Evangelism for Leaders course** was almost oversubscribed, with 160 people participating in one of the first three course offerings in 2020/2021. A further 65 are booked in for courses running 2021/2022. Plans are in hand for other parts of the **Everyone an Evangelist** process, including a small groups-based **training programme** designed to build confidence and capability in the whole church for evangelism, the **Community of Evangelists**, with a launch retreat scheduled for autumn 2021. a connexional **evangelistic presence at secular gatherings** including music festivals and sporting events in summer 2022, and work with ecumenical partners to resource local community outreach and evangelism during the **Queen's Platinum Jubilee** weekend (June 2022) with a Church-wide challenge to host or participate in street parties.
36. **Transformational Leadership:** www.methodist.org.uk/transformational-leadership/
After a pilot year of eight teams in 2020/2021, the **Transformational Leadership Learning Community** has 19 teams in its 2021/2022 cohort, with increased capacity available in 2022/2023, sign-up for which is now open. In partnership with the Ministries Team and the **Queen's Foundation**, a new tutorial position in Evangelism and Leadership based at The Queen's Foundation but exercising mission and ministry as an officer of the Connexional Team, was created.
37. **Every Church a Growing Church:** www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/
District mission planning training was offered in eight districts in 2020/2021 and is now available to any district, co-facilitated by the Learning Network and the Evangelism and Growth Team. Our ecumenical partnership with **Leading your Church into Growth** (LyCiG) developed the first Methodist LyCiG conference and saw nearly 200 people engage it in May 2021; another offering is being planned for spring 2022. After the positive feedback around the eight-step **Mission Planning Process** and Workbook published and available online in 2021/2022, work is underway to combine its practical wisdom with the 2018/2019 *Our Church's Future Story* resource into an all-in-one accessible resource that local leaders can use for mission.
38. **New Places for New People:** www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/start-new-places-for-new-people/
In 2020/2021, nine districts were involved in the first "tranche process" an intensive, year-long, co-creative discernment and planning process with the Evangelism and Growth team towards starting new Christian communities; these districts are now either moving towards the launch of **District-led new Christian communities** or are refining their project plans towards launch. In 2021/2022, twelve more districts are engaging in the process. Eight further districts are scheduled to engage in this planning process in 2022/2023. One remaining district is still in discernment about how it will engage this planning process. As part of equipping districts, circuits and local churches to begin New Places for New People (NPNP) projects (including Church at the Margins projects), the Evangelism and Growth team has consulted widely and written **Starting new Christian communities: A practical guide**. Eleven teams are part of the ongoing pilot project to **Multiply**

Fresh Expressions (small, organic faith communities), with another four teams preparing to join. The **Methodist Pioneer Pathways** (MPP) has grown to nearly 100 active pioneers in 2020/2021 – a 37% increase from the previous year. In coordination with the Learning Network, the MPP now has a stable and public architecture – including quarterly NPNP Hubs for those exploring an interest in pioneering, a clear process for applying for the MPPs, monthly learning communities for pioneers on the MPP, and annual retreats.

39. **Church at the Margins:** www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/

A 2020/2021 **consultation** on Church at the Margins (CAM) across the Connexion is now being expanded in partnership with JPIT, District Missioners, the Diaconate, and the Learning Network as the CAM strategy increases momentum to build new Christian communities among people experiencing economic marginalisation. The CAM movement's core beliefs (We are not taking God to the margins: we believe God is present with and in all people, in all circumstances and waits to be discovered) and values (Seek justice, Prioritise lived experience, Share power, Celebrate inclusion and participation, Enable local leadership) have been articulated in order to inform engagement. JPIT have worked closely with the Evangelism and Growth team ensuring that the work on UK **poverty** is fully integrated, organising joint webinars with the Church at the Margins Officer.

40. **Digital Evangelism**

Hope & Anchor, launching in September 2021, is a weekly online chat show that explores spirituality and faith in an inclusive, fun, non-judgmental way. Hope & Anchor features guests across the theological spectrum, from Britain and across the world, who are taking faith outside of the box, addressing challenging questions and preconceptions with intelligence and loads of laughter, and inviting listeners to explore new spiritual landscapes.

www.methodistchurch.org.uk/hope-anchor

The E+G Team continues to host a number of **monthly webinars** regarding missional reflection and practice, For example: webinars on chaplaincy and evangelism, interfaith evangelism, as well as contextual resourcing for specific seasons and ministry-roles. www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/check-out-evangelism-and-growth-webinars/

41. **Young Evangelists**

In partnership with Cliff College, a new **Young Evangelism Officer** has been appointed to build and connect a community of young people who are gifted as evangelists. The **Explore Evangelism Youth Group resource** is in final production for local leaders to engage with young people. The six sessions help grow theological understanding, spiritual confidence, and practical skills for inclusive evangelism and sensitive faith sharing.

42. **Rural Mission and Ministry**

A new full-time **Rural Mission and Ministries Officer** has been appointed.

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

43. Considerable work has gone in to providing information to churches, circuits and districts in relation to the Conference resolution asking all organisations to consider a voluntary contribution to the Pension Reserve Fund. This has included responding to a large volume of queries, providing FAQs, guidance on how to make the contributions and also the filming of a video between the President and the Director of Finance & Resources explaining the purpose of the appeal.

44. A new IT system has been procured to replace the Connexional Database. This is a major project for the team and the implementation will continue through into 2022. The Microsoft based system is a versatile platform that will be able to take over from a range of other IT systems currently in

use across the Connexional Team. In time, this enhanced integration should significantly improve our IT capabilities.

45. A new Supervision Policy was adopted by the Conference. Continuing development resources are being developed to support ongoing learning in Supervision. Training on Supervision on supervision is to be introduced. The roll out of this phase of the policy will take 5 years.
46. The annual gathering of superintendent ministers at their conference took place in June with 100 superintendents present. Online training for new superintendents has been offered on a monthly basis and will form the template for ongoing work.
47. The Director of Regional Learning and Development, working closely with the Wellbeing Adviser has enabled a cohort of 11 people including Learning Network staff and volunteers to undertake Mental Health First Aid (for adults) train the trainer training with the intention of being successfully accredited to deliver the MHFA 2-day training course. Once accredited there will be a number of MHFA courses offered across the Connexion during 2021-22 and beyond.
48. The Learning Network will be offering a number of online line management training opportunities during 2021-22.
49. The Learning Network has worked closely with the Safeguarding team and District Safeguarding Officers to develop, pilot and offer train the trainer events to enable the delivery of online based training opportunities for Creating Safer Space Foundation Module and Advance Module, utilising our online learning platform Theology X.
50. The new **World Mission Fund** (WMF) Grants forms have been used and our Partners' responses on the questions regarding Safeguarding have been collated and shared with the Safeguarding team so that we can learn from and share Partners' good practice, and support Partners where appropriate.
51. The GR team has conducted a review of travel in the light of the climate emergency and, under the direction of the Global Relationships Committee, is changing practice to ensure more efficient visits, with fewer flights and more overland/sea visits where practicality and security allow. Planning has begun for the resumption of some individual and group programmes involving international travel in 2022, but implementation is COVID-dependent.
52. The **Methodist Christmas campaign** 2021 is based on Luke 2:10. Recognising everyone's fatigue and the COVID-related uncertainty that will surround the approach of Christmas, we are encouraging congregations to reach out to their communities with the angels' message of hope, freedom from fear and, above all, joy. To help we have a number of resources available, all featuring 'Nativity', a painting by Dr He Qi – a Chinese artist currently resident in California, USA: www.heqiart.com Throughout Advent, we will be posting online a series of contemporary reflections linking Luke 2:10. Following the success of the 2020 Christmas CD, we have another CD of seasonal music and conversation, with matching posters and postcards for churches to personalise and distribute locally.
53. **Methodist Missionary Society archives** at Methodist Church House: The team have been able to find ways to continue the appraisal of the Methodist Missionary Society records from the Methodist Church House archive throughout lockdown, and as a result, managed to prepare and transfer to the SOAS Library c600 (of 1400) boxes of largely mid-twentieth century Methodist Missionary Society records in May 2021. A further transfer of a similar number of boxes is expected to take place before Christmas.

54. **Methodist Modern Art Collection:** Connexional Team staff have been closely involved in supporting the management committee with the interpretation, logistics and promotion of the Art Trail to relaunch the Art Collection. Thirty-five works have been on show in churches in the Coventry & Nuneaton Circuit and Coventry Cathedral in a trail entitled: Stories of Change – Hope, Faith & Love. The Trail is part of the circuit’s contribution to Coventry UK City of Culture, which has been supplemented by the churches with artists-in-residence and creative workshops. In addition, six works are being shown at Chester Cathedral as part of an exhibition responding to issues of diversity and inclusivity, Global Images of Christ, and a selection of the works from Coventry will be transferred to 3Generate to encourage conversation for our young people.
55. The Team in the Conference Office continues to support the work of the Conference, and the Council (including the additional meetings). There is also continued support for the processes and meetings following the 2021 Conference’s decisions on Oversight and Trusteeship.
56. The 2021 CPD is available on the website and hard copies are available to order. Resources are also available to support churches following the Conference’s decisions on Marriage and Relationships.
57. We are very pleased to report that both the standard Foundation and Advanced Module Safeguarding training courses are now both available as online facilitated training options. This has been a major undertaking which has been developed during the pandemic period.

Responding to the Gospel in partnership

58. The Global Relationships team is engaging with ALL WE CAN following changes they have made to their staffing/structure and purposes. A report will come to the Global Relationships Committee.
59. Seven **Mission Partners** in Training have entered Cliff College; two others have been accepted for training later in the connexional year. Two persons have been accepted under the new Accompanying Volunteer option. The processing of any new Mission Partner applications is now on hold due to the projected budget for post-2024.
60. Training resources for districts involved in **Twining** have been produced and added to the website.
61. **The Asbury Crossing:** We have been delighted to collaborate with the UMC’s General Commission on Archives & History to develop a programme of events, under the Concordat, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the calling of the Midlands ‘Black Country’ preacher, Francis Asbury, to lead the fledging American Methodist community in the 18th Century. The Asbury Crossing: Responding to the Call, 1771-2021, started in September with an online Americana folk music concert and a connexional service of commemoration of Asbury’s embarkation. The programme will conclude with similar UMC celebrations in Philadelphia in October. Over the intervening weeks, in the time while Asbury was at sea in this commemorative timeline, there will be weekly online content, which explores contemporary themes relevant to Asbury’s life and ministry.

In closing

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

*****RESOLUTION**

- 69/1. The Council receives the report.**