

Reaffirming *Our Calling*: the future call of the Methodist Church

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Summary of content

Subject and aims	This discussion paper responds to the conversations at the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Council which followed the presentation of the Statistics for Mission to the 2017 Conference. It outlines the challenges faced by the Methodist Church and offers some thoughts as to a way forward.
Consultations	CLF, SRC, Council.

INTRODUCTION

Sanctify us, Lord, and bless,
Breathe thy Spirit, give thy peace;
Thou thyself within us move,
Make our feast a feast of love.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

1. What follows is a contribution to the ongoing conversation about the work of God. This contains the main points of reflection at the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Methodist Council in the course of this connexional year. To undertake consideration of the work of God is to participate in a long standing and venerable Methodist tradition. At one time a number of bodies in the life of the Connexion were bidden to do so in their formal agendas. Not for the first time, it is important to recover that habit and to attend to the claim of God upon us as a people raised up to spread scriptural holiness across the land.
2. What has become clear since the triennial membership returns were presented to the 2017 Conference (*Conference Agenda 2017*, item 42) is that there is a willingness to reform as part of a response to the changing demographic of the Methodist Church. This willingness requires careful attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that the Methodist Church is faithful and hopeful as it participates in God's mission. As ever, there is an urgency in paying attention to the call of God. Such urgency is not to jump to hasty decisions, undertaking new work as if there were no heritage to build upon. Rather we have to attend to our call to be God's people with conviction and clarity. Set out in the following opening paragraphs of this paper are some of the fundamental elements of our connexional life – that is *Our Calling*, the nature of mission as we understand it as the Methodist people, and the role of Circuits and Districts in enabling and sustaining that mission.

A COMMON DUTY

3. In 2000 the Methodist Church, after a consultation on the purpose of the Church adopted the statement *Our Calling*.

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

The Church exists to:

- **Increase the awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love (Worship)**
- **Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care (Learning and Caring)**
- **Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice (Service)**
- **Make more followers of Jesus Christ (Evangelism)**

(Our Calling Conference Report 2000)

4. Part 10 of our standing orders goes on to give some articulation to this; *The Methodist Church is committed actively and intentionally to work towards a world transformed by the love of God, sharing the love of God and celebrating its place within a worldwide family.* (SO 1000(2))
In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Through the Church, the body of Christ, within which the Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place, God seeks to reconcile the world itself into a unity with Christ. In this mission, necessarily undertaken both locally and globally, the vocation of the Church is to be a sign, witness, foretaste and instrument of the Kingdom of God. (SO 1000(1))
5. *Mission carries a holistic understanding; the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel in the word, deed, prayer and worship and every day witness of the Christian life. Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission focusses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and discipleship.*
(From the World Council of Churches (WCC) statement 2000 and used in the Future Mission Together report to the 2012 Conference)

The Methodist Church actively engages in "this mission which lies at the heart of the nature, identity and self-understanding of the Church." (SO 1000(3))

6. After discussions within the Church the Conference affirmed certain *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (2004) recognising that "the Conference will have to review the priorities from time to time in light of experience."
7. The life, witness, service and wellbeing of the Methodist Church is experienced and made a reality at the level of the Districts and Circuits. It is here that support, and encouragement must be given if the Methodist Church is to have inspiration and hope and be reenergised for mission. Future activities should focus on the mission plans of these units and the Connexional Team should support the Circuits and Districts in these plans so that the whole Church can respond enthusiastically to *Our Calling*. Each District and Circuit should be equipped and resourced to create and update their mission plans and be supported in the implementation of these plans. In reaffirming *Our Calling* throughout the Connexion there is an urgent need for the Circuits to be the primary place for the engagement with the components of *Our Calling*. Circuits and Districts need to consider the use of resources (including both buildings and people) and what risks they will take to fulfil *Our Calling* in each particular context.
8. **Nature and Purpose of the District:** *The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns.* (SO 400A(1)).
9. **Nature and Purpose of the Circuit:** *The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission and mutual encouragement and help. It is in the Circuit that presbyters, deacons and probationers are stationed and local preachers are trained and admitted and exercise their calling. The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit to churches of other denominations and to participation in the life of the communities served by the Circuit, including local schools and colleges,*

and in ecumenical work in the area including, where appropriate, the support of ecumenical Housing Associations. (SO 500(1))

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE METHODIST CHURCH TODAY

10. The Statistics for Mission report to the 2017 Conference and wider discussions in the Church have recognised the following contemporary challenges:
- 3.5% year on year decline over the decade to 2016 (less than 200,000 members today). 100,000 membership and worship attendance lost in 12 years
 - Low acceptance of candidate numbers (19 in this connexional year)
 - Ordained ministry being spread thinner and thinner
 - Lack of experience in the task of evangelism and loss of confidence in speaking of the Gospel
 - Concerns about the quality of worship that is being offered in some places despite best efforts
 - Viability of smaller churches and circuits in question
 - Age profile of membership and public worship attendance is heavily skewed towards an older demographic with relatively large numbers above seventy years. There is a missing age group of about 20 to 45 years in the congregations.
 - Too many church properties that are underused, old and in a poor state of repair
 - Churches not taken too seriously by the public and the media and a growing secularisation of Britain (more people say they do not believe in God than say they are Christian)
 - Changing reality of Britain that is now multicultural, multi faith, multi ethnic, and very diverse and where poverty, inequality and discrimination are severe problems
 - The difficulty in finding and keeping volunteers to serve the church at various levels including lay leadership, committees and stewardship roles.
11. During the course of the last year, these statistics and challenges have been shared and discussed at meetings of the SRC, the CLF and the Council. The culmination of the reflections at the CLF and Council was to agree that **reaffirming *Our Calling* would be the primary strategic driver for the whole Church.** The meetings felt this to be a considered response to the promptings of the Spirit.

The CLF and the Council agreed **priority** areas for focus in the context of responding to and reaffirming *Our Calling* and which needed attention by the Church which were:

- To make more followers of Jesus Christ through mission and evangelism
 - To help members deepen their faith and to put their faith into action (discipleship)
 - To find ways to support the improvement in the quality of worship offered to God
 - To support and development of District and Circuit mission plans
 - To grow the number, variety and breath of vocations
 - To develop the property of the Church to support mission and evangelism
 - To be a more inclusive and welcoming Church
 - To evaluate and revise decision making processes of the Church so that they are effective and efficient enabling the Church to pursue its commitment to mission
 - To enable the Church to be a good neighbour, especially to people in need, to be prophetic and to challenge injustice
 - To ensure the Church fulfils its regulatory and good oversight responsibilities in key areas
12. In developing these priority areas it was agreed that certain guiding principles and values core to the Methodist Church would undergird the development of priorities. These principles were as follows:
- **Connexional Church:** The sense of being connected to a wider community throughout (at local church, circuit and district level) provides a sense of belonging and common purpose. This enables mutual support and the sharing of resources. In the sharing of resources and of experiences it is

important that Local Churches and Circuits have sufficient flexibility to make decisions in order to be responsive to the needs of the local communities (the principle of subsidiarity). Whilst making decisions they also require access to the wider experience of the whole Connexion.

- **Working in Partnership:** Wherever possible the Methodist Church will work in partnership with others at all levels and in many areas.
- **Inclusive Church:** The Methodist Church must be an inclusive and diverse community where all are welcome and the needs of the weak and vulnerable are recognised. Leadership throughout the church should reflect this and be inclusive.
- **Teamwork and cooperation between the lay and ordained members:** The complementary roles of lay and ordained are essential to the decision making process and the oversight of the Methodist Church.
- Recognise and **accept that the Methodist Church is smaller today** and that it must therefore behave like one that has c. 180,000 members. This means that structures, decision-making processes and ways of working need to be adapted and choices made about which work we need to lay down for a time.
- **Prepared to set priorities:** The Methodist Church must agree some focused priorities under the *Our Calling* agenda.
- Sticking with a **consistent message and plan** for the next few years, resisting the desire to move on to the next thing. Educating and empowering all members with a clear vision, direction and plan for the Church so that all could own it and support it.
- **Having a Connexional Team which serves the Church:** *The overall task of the Connexional Team is to assist the Church in furthering the purposes of the Methodist Church in particular enabling it to better fulfil its calling of responding to God's love in Christ and working out its discipleship in mission and worship. (SO 303(1)).* The Connexional Team would focus on resourcing the Circuits and Districts in their mission plans in response to *Our Calling*.

TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE: RESOURCING OUR CONNEXIONAL LIFE

13. With this framework and direction for the Methodist Church agreed, complementary strategic planning has begun in some of the priority areas, other work will develop at different times. This allows for an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach to all the plans and to ensure they fulfil the values, vision and focus of *Our Calling*.
14. In light of this the CLF, the Council and the SRC have instigated work in a number of areas as well as continuing to monitor ongoing work which will be impacted by this focus. Such areas include:
 - Identifying apt and appropriate resources to further support **evangelism and growth** throughout the Connexion.
 - **Development of District and Circuit Mission plans** in keeping with SO 400A(1), SO 500(1) and SO 962. These need to be updated and include how the Church will be a good neighbour to people in need and will challenge injustice.
 - **Connexional Vocations and Ministry Strategy:** This should lead to growth in the number, variety and breath of vocations allowing for a coherent and connexional approach to developing patterns of ministry for the whole people of God. It will ensure that there are sufficient ministers and lay leadership with the required gifts and qualities who are effectively deployed, and to support these people in their calling, development, ministry and retirement.
 - **Review of the decision-making and oversight processes** and ways of working so as to provide simple and cost-effective mechanisms for the oversight of the Methodist Church.
 - **Connexional Finance Strategy:** to resource and support new initiatives and plans being developed as the Methodist Church reaffirms its commitment to *Our Calling*. Such a strategy would also ensure careful stewardship of resources.
 - **Connexional Property Strategy** for the use of Methodist property in mission and evangelism (Council minute 17.3.11)

- **Enabling the evolution of the Connexional Team** to support best the Church in engaging and responding to *Our Calling*.

This has been considered alongside ongoing work that is before the Conference such as One Mission, marriage and relationships, Mission and Ministry in Covenant.

15. **The Church fulfils its commitment to *Our Calling* through Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism**, but key to all of this work is how the Methodist people can be revitalised to respond “to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.”

OUR CALLING: A METHODIST WAY OF LIFE¹

16. As this work has developed a constant question has been how any ‘culture change’ in the Connexion will be accomplished; the view is that this will not be achieved solely through a Connexional focus on reaffirming *Our Calling*. There is a concern that no amount of Connexional reflection will enable local churches and the Methodist people to take bold and sometime hard decisions about their future. A constant refrain is about the ‘tiredness’ of the Methodist people and the challenge of engaging with new ideas or responding to the gospel in a new way. With this in mind work, begun in a number of places, has come together to develop a Methodist Way of Life which is focused around *Our Calling*. Only by each follower of Christ being continually transformed in the love of Christ will the Church be able to live as a faithful, joyful and committed community. For the early Methodists a set of rules were in place not to be restrictive, but to be life giving. Not to distract from joyful living, but to enable faithful attention to the activity of God in the heart and in the world. By linking membership with a Methodist Way of life we offer the opportunity for membership to be understood again as part of a deeper commitment to Christ and an expression of our desire to live in a connexional way with one another. It moves membership away from being solely about property upkeep or financial giving and stresses the importance and the joy of mutual accountability and journeying together.
17. The main areas of a Methodist Way of Life could include the following:
- As far as we are able:*
- WORSHIP**
- We will pray daily
 - We will worship regularly
 - We will look and listen for God each day
- LEARNING AND CARING**
- We will seek to learn more of God and God’s world
 - We will practise friendship and care for others and for ourselves
 - We will honour creation and tend the environment
 - We will practise hospitality and generosity
- SERVICE**
- We will be good neighbours to those in need
 - We will challenge injustice
 - We will seek the common good
- EVANGELISM**
- We will witness to the love of God in Jesus
 - We will speak of the faith to others

¹ A Methodist Way of Life – material developed by the Revd Dr Roger Walton as part of consideration of a new monasticism.

- We will help each other be better disciples

18. Living a Methodist Way of Life is clearly not something that is to be done in isolation. As we offer all the opportunity to increase their accountable living as disciples of Christ we want to be able to offer each other the opportunity to be a people who seek to be nurtured and supported as we go deeper. In our history we know that the role of the class meeting was a key attractational feature for early Methodists. Church growth in our time remains connected to the presence of accountable small groups in the life of larger worshipping communities, and more often than not this is not offered as a choice but as the expectation of fruitful living. Living a Methodist Way of Life needs to offer that challenge and support to each and every one of us as we seek to fulfil our calling as Methodists in our current contexts.

19. For John Wesley the 'means of grace' were channels whereby grace is conveyed. 'The chief of these are prayer whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him.'

20. Some outline questions for small groups may look like this:

WORSHIP

- What is the pattern of your prayer life?
- How easy or hard do you find it?
- What has recently spoken to you in worship or Bible study?
- When has God been close to you? Has God felt distant?

LEARNING AND CARING

- How and what are you learning at the moment?
- Who or what has God given you to care for?
- How have you practiced generosity and hospitality since we last met?

SERVICE

- How are you serving your neighbours?
- What issues of justice are you involved in? Are there any you need to take up?
- How can we support you in your commitments?

EVANGELISM

- How have you witnessed to God's love?
- What opportunities have there been to share your faith since we last met?
- Are there any particular people you should pray for or invite to consider Christian Faith?

21. In the way that many recall the production of resources to help Circuits and churches to think through *Our Calling* at its launch, work would be carried out to offer a suite of resources to help Methodists commit to this Way of Life.

OUR CALLING: CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT MISSION PLANS

22. Over the last few years there have been a number of Memorials and Notices of Motion which have responded to the current situation and looked for ways by which we can have a clearer focus for the future throughout the Connexion. One such Notice of Motion came in 2017:

In the light of the address given by the President of the Conference, the Conference with immediate effect encourages every Church Council annually to address and answer the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?'

The answer should be presented to the Circuit Meeting in order to aid their wider, strategic oversight of mission and ministry. The responses should also be annually reported to the District in order to fuel their discussions of Standing Order 962.

Should a local church offer no growth plan (within two years) they should be strongly encouraged and supported as they consider their end of life plan. The Conference directs the Council to undertake work on how this can best be implemented and report to the 2018 Conference.²

23. Such Memorials and Notices of Motion remind us that the life, witness, service and wellbeing of the Methodist Church is experienced primarily in the life of Local Churches. It is by being interconnected through the Circuit that we can best support one another, challenge ourselves and others, as well as determine the resources needed for our participation in God's mission. It is here that support and encouragement must be given if the Methodist Church is to have inspiration and hope and be reenergised for mission. Future activities should focus on the mission plans of these units (with the support of a reconfigured Connexional Team and the District) so that the whole Connexion can respond enthusiastically to *Our Calling*. Each Circuit should be equipped and resourced to create and update their mission plans and be supported in the implementation of these plans. In reaffirming *Our Calling* throughout the Connexion there is an urgent need for the Circuits to be the primary place for the engagement with *Our Calling* as the strategic driver for the future of the Methodist Church. Circuits and Districts need to consider the use of resources (including both buildings and people) and what risks they will take to fulfil *Our Calling* in each particular context.
24. Therefore the development of District and Circuit Mission Plans, which are contextual and flexible, in keeping with SO 400A(1), SO 500(1) and SO 962, is critical to how we respond to the grace of God. This must be done with the recognition of the need both for careful, informed planning and creating the conditions which enable churches/circuits to have conversations about what is important and what God is calling them to. We need to do this in full recognition that we are participating in God's mission in our local context and our own lives.
25. The Circuit Mission Plan could embody the following:
 - Reflect a journey with each of the churches in the Circuit as they look at *Our Calling* and assess their own health and vitality for the future – this could include deciding where resources for growth will be allocated as well as where a ministry of pastoral care is needed
 - Continue to be added to and updated, shared with the District, regularly referred to and actively worked with to be achieved.
 - Encourage Local Churches to view their Circuit, positively and realistically.
 - Take notice of the needs of each individual society and also the District Mission Plan (see below).
 - Think appropriately about opportunities for church planting.
 - Examine the value and contribution of ecumenical and other partnerships in enabling mission.
 - Think radically and honestly about the place and purpose of ministerial appointments in the Circuit.
 - Look at the use of skilled lay volunteers as well as considering pooling resources to employ lay employees in a variety of ways (including with reference to property, finance and administration).
 - Pay attention to the things that need to stop in the life of a Circuit (or at least be laid down for a time).
 - Understand the pressures, joys, sorrows and contexts of the communities we serve that we may not be reaching
 - Ask each church to identify, audit and build itself around a few priorities.

² Work is already underway in supporting Circuits in thinking in this way through a working group, comprising Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) staff and members of the District Mission Enabler network, which has begun work on producing a small resource pack. This pack will explain the background of the Notice of Motion and provide tools to help Local Churches discern what they are being called to, drawing together good practice that is already happening locally as well as Appreciative Inquiry techniques. Another aspect of this work has been the hugely successful 'Reimagining Church' roadshows which have shared good practice from different places about mission priorities.

- Examine what financial resources are being held in reserve and how these could be utilised for mission.
 - Ask where ministry is most needed, as opposed to where it can be afforded.
 - Make hard decisions about the future of the number of churches in the Circuit for the future
 - Learn from other Circuits where mission activities are flourishing.
 - A focus on the joy of Christians gathering together to worship God.
26. What is crucial is that Mission Plans, whether for Circuits or Districts, do not become one more activity that stops us from engaging in the mission itself. Serious consideration needs to be given to how we move from strategy to action in many places and that must be part of the ongoing work. Circuit Mission Plans are central to an ongoing culture change in the reimagining of our Church and a reaffirming of *Our Calling*.
27. Recurring throughout the discussion on how Circuit Mission Plans are effective has been the question about the right place for Managing Trusteeship to rest in our connexional structure. For many people the time to consider moving trusteeship away from Local Churches and placing it in the Circuit would seem to be now. There are many factors which make this so in people's minds;
- The ever growing responsibilities being placed on diminishing and ageing groups of people
 - The need for decisions to be taken somewhere other than in each local church if we are to have a strategic and holistic response to the challenges we face
 - The desire to promote fruitfulness in each and every place which frees people up for mission
28. This matter now needs serious and urgent addressing if we want to signal change – if the Circuit is the primary unit for mission it needs to become the place where decisions can be made about how that mission is best enabled.
29. **Alongside the consideration of a requirement for Circuits to produce Mission Plans there had been** discussion at the Connexional Leaders' Forum since September 2016 about the possible changes to SO 962:
- 962 Development Plan.** The district Policy Committee shall formulate and keep under annual review a development master-plan for the Methodist church buildings and circuit staffing of the District taking into account Planning Authority proposals (e.g., new residential areas, new road proposals, and urban centre redevelopment). Existing and proposed church buildings of other denominations shall be noted, particularly with a view to ecumenical co-operation or the formation of local ecumenical partnerships and the consideration of projects under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969. In Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod the master-plan shall take account of and give effect to any action of Y Cyngor under Standing Order 491(3). Any such project may be referred for detailed consideration to a group appointed by the committee for that purpose. The committee shall report annually to the Synod upon any such projects and upon the content and implementation of the development master-plan generally.
30. Since that time, with the work on the reaffirmation of *Our Calling* it would seem wise to bring this Standing Order up to date and enlarge this Development Plan into a District Mission Plan, also built around *Our Calling*.
31. The District Mission Plan could contain much of the same areas for consideration as the Circuit Mission Plan but asking those questions of all the Circuits in the District as well as taking note of the connexional direction of travel. There would be an ongoing iterative process between the Circuit and District Mission Plans, to ensure that they are taking account of the needs of the Circuits.
32. Early in the process thinking was undertaken about how both Circuits and Districts could be resourced to undertake the creation of Mission Plans. Consideration has been given to what could be connexionally financed to support primarily Districts in this task. The expectation being that any

District resource would work with those already existing in the Connexional Team as well as working closely with the Circuits in determining their Mission Plans. Out of this thinking emerged the idea of having a 'District Mission Enabler/Supporter' in each District which would act as an additional resource to that which Districts had already identified. It was recognised that some Districts had already made provision for this kind of resource and so conversations could be had about be work together connexionally to fill in the gaps or provide resource of other kinds for those Districts.

33. The role of the District Mission Enabler/Supporter could include the following:
- Supporting each Circuit as they ask themselves how they are living out their calling, helping churches assess their own health and vitality for the future.
 - Working with the District Leadership Teams to help further develop an overall District Mission Plan based on input from the various Circuit Mission Plans in that District.
 - Helping to support evaluation and decision making around appointments in the District which could include reintroducing establishment figures to help aid deployment.
 - Providing additional support to Circuits and they evaluate ecumenical and other partnerships.
 - Supporting work which enable vocational discernment throughout the District.
 - Continuing to build on the interest and response to the 'reimagining church' agenda.
 - Assisting grant making processes in the District.
34. Resources have been identified that will enable a pilot of this way of working to be carried out in the next connexional year before any full commitment is asked for from the Conference.

OUR CALLING: METHODIST COUNCIL OBJECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

35. The Methodist Council has devoted significant time to considering its responsibilities in relation to reaffirming *Our Calling*. This work was further commented on by the Connexional Leaders' Forum which brought much refinement to the work. Through a process of discussion and feedback the Council has identified a number of objectives for the work it is responsible for either through its own Agenda, the work of its Committees or the work of the Connexional team. The overarching objectives are as follows:

Worship– increase the awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love

1. Proclaiming the Gospel through worship

Objective: to consider how best to enable every act of worship conducted in the name of the Methodist Church to give honour to God through excellence, creativity, prayerful contemplation and encompassing a variety of spiritualities.

2. The ministry of the whole people of God in the life of the world

Objective: to have a clear articulation of the Church's engagement with God's mission and therefore to ensure there are ministers, local preachers and lay leaders of the required gifts and qualities for that mission and that they are effectively deployed. Enabling all people to discern and utilise their gifts in responding to Our Calling.

Learning and Caring – help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care

3. Resources for the Church: the use of God's good gifts

Objective: to use the resources of the Church to support Districts, Circuits and churches to be most effective in their mission, by providing cost-effective connexional specialist services and relevant local based resources

4. Oversight and Leadership

Objective: to operate the oversight/leadership functions of the Methodist Church as effectively as possible in pursuit of the Church's mission ensuring the most appropriate use of resources.

Service – be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice

5. A Church for all people

Objective: to be an inclusive and diverse Church by extending our reach and engagement with those who feel marginalized, ensuring that all feel protected to be able to participate.

6. Social Holiness

Objective: to resource work and programmes which then transform our society and communities to embody the Kingdom of God through living out our social holiness; offering loving acts of justice and service to all and challenging injustice wherever we see it.

Evangelism: Making more followers of Jesus Christ

7. Evangelism

Objective: to equip and give confidence to the Methodist people to share the Gospel of Christ with those in our local communities so as to lead people to making a personal commitment to Christ.

8. One Mission

Objective: To be celebrating and playing a full part in the global community of Methodists (eg the World Methodist Council and the European Methodist Council) for the sake of the transformation of the world through the sharing of the gospel, and being a confident Church acting prophetically in our own Connexion with ecumenical and other partners.

*A world transformed by God's love;
a confident Church motivated to share God's love;
a people celebrating being part of a worldwide family.*

[Vision Statement for Mission, adopted by the 2012 Conference DR 3/16]

36. For each of these Objectives there are a number of detailed action points which cover the next few years. These are continuing to be refined and the Council will continue with this work at its next meeting.
37. The major resource the Council is responsible for is the Connexional Team. Over the year the Council has received a variety of reports enabling it to discern if the Team was reflecting the desire to put *Our Calling* at the heart of our work. To that end the Council authorised some changes in the structure and personnel of the Team to enable some new areas of work to be created whilst bringing others to a close to enable that to happen. In structural terms this has meant the realignment of some managements responsibilities as well as a limited number of redundancies. All of this has been done in conjunction with the changes to the Team brought about in light of the Training Review which is reported on in the Conference Agenda.
38. The Council has been able to create some new roles, particularly focusing on Evangelism and Growth which was felt to be a need that had to be addressed urgently.
39. The Council has therefore undertaken a huge amount of work in this year to date to take a lead on the prioritisation of reaffirming *Our Calling*.

END PIECE

40. *The Methodist Church in Britain is ready for change. We sense in many places signals of hope, a willingness to take risks and creative actions inspired by the gospel. We can re-group our resources and make a difference, especially in partnership with others. We can glimpse a shared vision of God's action in the world and feel again the compulsion of sharing in God's mission. We are beginning to enjoy again the strength and encouragement that came from pulling together across the Connexion and*

rediscovering our connexionalism. Long-standing problems are no longer being avoided but are tackled with energy and imagination. God's spirit is rebuilding our confidence.

(Our Calling Conference 2000)

Nobody in the Methodist Church can stand idle and oversee a steady decline. We are called to be agents of transformation, challenged to respond to God's love in Christ. Consequently, we must pay attention to growth and development in the life, mission and service of the Church of Jesus Christ. All this should enable the members, Districts and the Circuits to find purpose and direction for their mission plans and witness. It is a time for action. A reaffirmation of *Our Calling* and the agreed strategic plan will give the Connexion inspiration, hope, a sense of purpose and clarity of direction. While the future is in God's hands the Church can discern what God would like it to focus on today and for the next few years. In all this God will be with the Church always.

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.*

*He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.*

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Discussion Questions for the Conference

1. What do Local Churches and the Methodist people need to take the ideas in this paper forward?
2. Do you think the whole Connexion should commit to resourcing a Methodist Way of Life?
3. How can we, together, resource the development and implementation of Circuit Mission Plans?
4. Is this the time to review patterns and models of trusteeship [see paragraph 27]?
5. What might the Methodist Council need to lay aside to enable new work to develop?