Re-Shaping Our Circuit Consultation

# The Journey So Far

For some years now we have known that our financial position as a circuit is unsustainable and we have been running a deficit of 2-300k per year. The decision to keep running this deficit was one encouraged by the Connexion when it spoke of not holding onto big reserves of money and so we have been choosing to keep our staffing high to support all of our churches, schools, projects and chaplaincies with the mission which God is calling us into.

Over the last 12 months we have been looking more seriously at how we might move forward more pro-actively in the future and have enlisted the help of Rob Legge, an experienced charity sector director and consultant who works extensively with the Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council, in order to have a challenging outside voice to push us to consider our options. For both financial reasons and because of a national shortage, we know that the future will involve less Ministerial staff.

In February, pre-COVID, part of the Leadership Team met to discuss what the future might look like and to begin to discuss plans. It was felt at this meeting that we needed to make bold changes to the way we operate and that vitally important within this was a process for consulting everyone who would be impacted by the change that was to come.

In September 2020 we began this process, first with the Ministers meeting to share their thoughts, then the Lay Employees, followed by the Circuit Assembly.

# What Next?

Now, over the next few months, we would like the further input of our churches, projects, schools and chaplaincies as we begin to discuss what a more effective, but smaller and smarter circuit will look like as we seek to continue carrying out God’s mission. This will be done using the questions on page two of this document, where we are asking you, our Church Councils, to discuss some key questions this autumn.

At our March 2021 Circuit Assembly, it is our hope to present one or more models of how we might move forward. These will be based on the consultations we have already completed with the Ministers, Lay Workers and September 2020 Circuit Assembly, as well as the church input given via page two of this document.

We will also be looking at all that we have learned about ourselves over the last few years, including previous consultation work that you have completed for us, and the progress we have made so far with our Mission and Ministry Teams, which in many cases were hampered just as they were picking up pace by Coronavirus earlier this year.

In addition to this we will also need to consider the impact that Coronavirus has had, and will have, on our mission and ministry into the future.

Finally, we must remember that we are focussed on what God is calling us to as Methodists in Birmingham, as churches in our local communities and as individuals living out our faith where we live and work. As a circuit we do not simply want to cut back and support decline, but also look for new things and for opportunities, both within our existing structure but also pioneering things in new places. Enabling the places where, as a whole body of almost three thousand people, we see God at work.

# Your Input

We’d really appreciate each Church Council to consider the following questions which we also looked at during the Circuit Assembly, with the input of other groups in your church if you think that would be helpful. Your Circuit Assembly Reps might be ideally placed to help facilitate this conversation.

1. **How can we work together as the people of God in a Circuit where there are less ordained Ministers?**

Context for Q2: Within our denomination structure, Presbyters will need to remain in pastoral charge, however, maintaining the number of churches that we have with the Presbyters in their current expected role is unsustainable. One suggested model to address this is to develop the role of Lay Pastors based in local churches and the building of a team ministry. The exact role of these Lay Pastors is probably in some way’s context based and dependent on the mission of the local church. They are likely to not be paid, at least for the most part, and to be a voluntary local lay leader. *Please see appendix on page three for the Methodist definition of Lay Pastors.*

1. **What do you think of a model involving Lay Pastors and specifically, how might we explore pioneering ministry (new and innovative missional work) within it?**

Context for Q3: In order to support our thirty-four churches and our projects, chaplaincies and schools with a smaller team, we need to be more effective and efficient in how we administer our circuit and how we operate.

1. **What ideas do you have for making our circuit smaller, smarter and more focussed on mission?**

Please send your church’s answers to strategy@birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk. We’d appreciate if you didn’t make them TOO long but do feel free to take up more space than we’ve given. Scans or photographs of written up answers are also fine. Contact Tom Milton if you would like to discuss them or any background information before your conversation via tmilton@birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk or 07875 379 460.

# Appendices

**The following is a definition of Lay Pastors from the Methodist Church website,** [which you can find in full here](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/employees-and-volunteers/supporting-local-ministry/learning-and-development/learning-and-development-for-local-lay-pastors/).

“Local Lay Pastors are people engaged in lay ministry authorised by a local church or circuit and acting in a pastoral and mission leadership role in a local congregation. They may be paid or voluntary, full-time or part-time. They are commissioned to engage in pastoral ministry and mission on behalf of, and in collaboration with, local church members, for specified periods of time. An individual’s ministry will vary according to their gifts and skills, and the local situation.

In some cases, they may be a ‘pioneer’ - someone who, as a primary focus of their ministry, is connecting with, and aiming to encourage the formation of, disciples among un-churched or de-churched people and intentionally developing a new ecclesial Christian community, or fresh expression of church.”