

INTRODUCTION



The Methodist Church is marked by the faithful service of thousands of women and men who give their time, energy and wisdom in serving the Church through committees and meetings which facilitate the Church at local and national level.

The Work of God in this Place emerged from a conversation with members of the Learning Network and the Chairs of District in the North West and Mann region around how we could support those who chair meetings to integrate conversation with and about God into the way a committee discusses, acts and decides.

It may be that a group's agenda is already very full, and that adding extra time for prayer and reflection seems impossible. Groups are already working very hard. The hope is that this resource will support people rather than be an additional burden. It also seems to be true that the more time given to listening to God, the more quickly a meeting goes.

John Wesley often asked,

"What is the state of the work of God in this place?"

This resource aims to provide some ways of exploring that question.

Ways to use this resource

Please feel free to use this resource in whatever way helps.

- It is fine to decide beforehand how much time you can give to this, perhaps aiming for 15-20 minutes in a two-hour meeting or 30 minutes in a three-hour one.
- You might want to give a copy to every committee member, or photocopy particular pages, or just read the material aloud.
- You are also free to use as many or as few of the questions as seem helpful. The resource can be used by the person chairing the meeting, or be delegated to someone, or used in turn by different group members.

These are only suggestions; do what works in your particular circumstance.

Opening passages

We encourage using both the Scripture passage and the passage from John or Charles Wesley. The first keeps us grounded in the word of God. The second roots us in the wisdom that helped to give birth to Methodism. All Scripture passages are taken from the Anglicised edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is the standard Bible text used in Methodist Church publications. Passages are deliberately short, so that they can be read again several times if that is helpful. The hymn passages by Charles Wesley can be either read or sung, depending on numbers and enthusiasm! We have opted to quote John and Charles Wesley as they originally wrote. Their language, however, is not always inclusive. We would therefore encourage you to adapt the quotations as you use them, so that the message of each passage is inclusive of everyone.

Hymns

In addition to the few hymn verses that appear in the 'words from John/Charles Wesley' sections, we have also selected hymns for singing, one for each of the 15 themes. These suggestions draw on hymns that reflect a wide range of hymn writers and are easier to sing in small groups. A further list of hymns suitable for meetings can be found at the end of this introduction.

As we begin

To consider alone

People come to meetings from other activities, and may have had busy timetables or stressful journeys. We encourage a few minutes of quiet to help people to settle in. It is important to become aware of God, who is interested and involved in the work of your meeting. We encourage devoting a reasonable block of time to this opening section; times of silence tend to pass more quickly than we might sometimes fear.

To consider together

You know your group, so you will know the best way to use the questions provided. For a small meeting, it may be possible for everyone to talk together. However, you may decide to divide people into smaller groups. If so, try to ensure a good mix, so that people have an opportunity to speak to those they do not see often. Set a time limit, let people know how long they have and encourage them to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. Let them know when there is one minute left, and then invite everyone back into the larger group.

As we continue

Sometimes meetings begin and end with prayer, but lose sight of God in the middle! How you choose to insert the 'as we continue' questions is up to you. Here are some suggestions:

- Agree at the beginning to pause at a particular point in the agenda.
- Agree a time to pause around half way through the allotted time.
- Have someone set an alarm on their mobile phone (without telling the others what time they've chosen) and pause when the alarm sounds. It is best if the person setting the alarm is not the person chairing the meeting.

As we finish

Finishing off may be the most tempting part of this resource to leave out. If the meeting is running over time, or if people are in a rush to be elsewhere, it is easier to say a quick blessing and hurry away. However, of all the parts of these outlines, this is probably the most important. God has been at work in the meeting, and it is important to recognise and appreciate that. It is also good to give time for people to have a chance to bring their gratitude, concerns or annoyances to God before departing. It is also true that the end of the meeting is the beginning of the next stage of the ministry of the group to the wider Church and community – which makes it all the more important to mark the transition with prayer.

HYMNS



More hymns suitable for meetings generally

Best of all is God is with us *Singing the Faith 610*

Let love be real, in giving and receiving *Singing the Faith 615*

Lord of life, we come to you *Singing the Faith 651*

Because the Saviour prayed that we be one *Singing the Faith 675*

Love came down at Christmas *Singing the Faith 210*

We will walk with God, my brothers *Singing the Faith 484*

May the God of hope go with us every day *Singing the Faith 411*

Shalom chaverim *Singing the Faith 414*

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy *Singing the Faith 526*

Thou God of truth and love *Singing the Faith 620*

Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world
Singing the Faith 462

Here as we kneel, here as we pray *Singing the Faith 521*

O God of Bethel, by whose hand *Singing the Faith 475*

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart *Singing the Faith 545*

Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming *Singing the Faith 625*