

Connexional Team Update

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| Status of Paper | Final |
| Action Required | Note |
| Resolution | 31/1. The Council receives the report |

Summary of Content

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| Subject and Aims | This paper offers the Council an update of work undertaken by the Connexional Team since the Council last met in January 2017. |
| Main Points | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work that is going on in the Team |

Connexional Team Update

- 1 This paper offers the Council an update of work undertaken by the Connexional Team since the Council last met in January 2017, offering some details of the work going on in the Team.

Discipleship and Ministries

- 2 The work of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) continues to develop with the specialist teams being involved with several ongoing initiatives.
- 3 Four Bible Month Planning Days have taken place around the connexion, with an average of 40 people attending each event. Bible Month is a resource which supports local churches and circuits in exploring a particular book of the Bible (this year James) over a short period promoting biblical literacy, deeper engagement with the text and the use of different hermeneutical tools.
- 4 A series of *Reimagine* events is being run across the connexion in eight districts in a partnership between the DMLN and the District Evangelism Enablers network. The events are based on a resource day called *ReThink Church* which ran in London in April 2016. The first forum took place in the Northampton District, attracting over a hundred participants. In other districts work has begun on running circuit *Reimagine* events.
- 5 A new resource *Appreciating Church: A Practical Appreciative Inquiry Resource for Church Communities* has been published in a joint initiative involving input from the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Society of Friends, the Congregational Federation and the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool. The resource offers a strengths-based approach to work in church and community and draws upon a number of case studies rooted in the life of the local church. The resource is supported by a website, <http://appreciating.church/>
- 6 The work of the regional teams continues to be focused on meeting the needs of those in the regions, discerned through the work of the Regional Forums. These are developing into places that reflect on the contextual learning and development needs of the church and discern how the regional teams can support that learning and development.

Scholarship Research and Innovation

- 7 Research commissioned by the Conference about *Regrouping for Mission* presented to the Council and will be summarised in the Council's report to the Conference. It will evidence that Methodism is strong on organisational restructuring but significantly weak in making more followers of Jesus Christ. The associated evangelism research will be further developed to help Methodism understand better how we might engage more intentionally in evangelism.
- 8 The Fresh Expressions related research will continue into 2017-18 looking at new forms of church that do not currently meet the Fresh Expressions criteria and so have not yet been considered for what they might teach us. The Church of England has not yet studied their equivalents and it is hoped this research might be a major contribution to this area of thinking and practice. Insights from the 'Growing Methodism in the North East' research project will be publishing in the spring. All these research projects engage with circuits and congregations through a significant number of case studies to learn from the practice of Methodism. Insights are increasingly shared at conferences, at Synods and at circuit and other Methodist events.

Through @methodistSRI and Research Matters a regular stream of research insights, publications and resources are shared to assist local Methodism in learning from scholarship and enhancing practice.

- 9 Plans for the August 2018 Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies are on track including a new development that enables wider Methodism to share in the Institute for one of the days. The 2nd Annual Research Conference will be held in Cambridge in April and a 'young Methodist scholars' conference will be held in May 2017 for the first time. The Luther 500 ecumenical conference to be shared with the Lutheran and Moravian Churches in May has received a surprisingly strong number of papers for the academic stream. Funding for presbyters and deacons undertaking HE awards has been raised from £1500 to £2500 pa from Sep 2017 onwards. There are now eight institutions offering a Hon Methodist Research Scholar scheme, with conversations ongoing with further institutions.

Education

- 10 A significant focus of the activity in the education area is around setting up the Wesley Trust and bringing the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) and Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST) together. However, although that is a significant part of the work, it is only a small part of the story. The main focus of the work in the team is the ongoing support to our schools, almost 90 of them, of which 66 are in the maintained sector. Only two of the schools require focused intervention as all the others are judged good or outstanding. A major strand of work is supporting schools in developing their ethos and preparing for inspection of this under SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) – it is in their ethos, and their attention to pastoral care, that our schools are considered particularly to shine.
- 11 A number of Districts have sought support with specific aspects of their schools work, for example, when making education the focus of a District Synod. One District is working alongside a new development in school provision locally and we have been providing technical help on their behalf to ensure that ethos and inspection requirements are met. The SIAMS inspection framework itself is being rewritten and, in partnership with our Anglican colleagues, we are involved in the working group but also taking the opportunity to rework the appendix on Methodist identity. We have also initiated a project in the Free Churches Education Committee which has now received funding from the Westhill Foundation: this will develop materials about aspects of the beliefs and practices of the Free Churches as a digital downloadable resource for schools. Schools resources for teaching about Methodism are also in the planning stages: these will cover a wide brief including both materials for use in schools and materials for churches who want to be more involved in schools work locally. The headteachers' day conference for schools in the maintained sector is planned for May.

Mission and Advocacy

Consultation on Religious Freedom

- 12 A significant new initiative reaches fruition in March, with an international consultation on religious freedom and persecution involving some ten of our partner churches from around the world, as well as a selection of voices from within the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB). World Church Relationships have worked very closely with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) in preparing for this, the first of the "new-style" partner consultations envisaged in the strategy for global relationships and a great opportunity to draw on JPIT's expertise in an international context.

World Church Relationships

- 13 In addition to the consultation, other work continues on implementing the new strategy. A new part-time contract post has been created to help set up new “People to People” programmes and filled from the start of March, giving us a key resource to deliver these plans. Under the guidance of the Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee (GRSOSC), discussions with All We Can have led to the trialling of joint capacity-building programmes with two partner churches in the coming months. Work has also continued on refining the grant-making processes, with new timetables, criteria and application forms, in consultation with the World Church Sub-Committee to the Connexional Grants Committee, and its streams.

Joint Public Issues (JPIT)

- 14 As ever, JPIT’s workplan covers a wide range of societal issues. Resources are under preparation to help churches with “post-Brexit” conversations, including videos that are being made with the support of the Communications team. A response was made recently to the government’s consultation on further changes to the benefits system; a resource is now available on fracking; work continues on other environmental priorities. JPIT also continues to resource the four Churches in responding to news and current issues, with a strong statement being issued jointly on the government’s decision to stop taking unaccompanied refugee children. By the time Council meets there is likely to be a new JPIT logo to strengthen the identity of the team.

Engagement

- 15 The team is back to full strength, with the appointment of a Fundraising Officer. A great deal of work has gone into preparing an Aldersgate Day campaign, based around raising our people’s awareness of the significance of John Wesley’s experience, sharing stories of how God has worked in our own lives, and encouraging a generous response through support of the mission funds. This includes new personal-giving materials under the title #iGive.
- 16 Work is being done to identify possible solutions, and resource implications, for the substantial quantity of archival material stored in the basements of Methodist Church House. While we have well-established arrangements for archiving at John Rylands and SOAS, much work has to be done on the files before they can be sent to those libraries and clearing the backlog will require additional resource.
- 17 The Heritage Officer has been significantly engaged with Epworth Old Rectory, facilitating a workshop with Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) in order to reach a shared vision that can also be a platform for fundraising. Plans are well advanced for the reopening of the New Room, Bristol, on 9-10 June. As well as the existing key sites, Oxford, Heptonstall, Styal, Brighouse and Stockton-on-Tees are among other locations which we are endeavouring to support.

Publishing and Communications

- 18 Work continues on the new website, with both the navigation and the “look and feel” being key topics. The site will go live by the early summer.
- 19 An increasing number of videos are being requested to support resources of many different kinds. The Media team produces these alongside their other work and we are looking at adding resource to that area. Videos currently in hand or planned include fundraising, JPIT and safeguarding materials.

- 20 The publishing team continue to produce both annual and one-off books, magazines and other products. Sales of the 2017 diary were significantly up on the past two years, thanks in no little part to there being no recurrence of the supply problems that have dogged recent issues. Sales of *Singing the Faith* are however declining, not unexpectedly. A new edition of the resource *Presence* for rural churches is due out shortly and future new releases will include a new children's book about John Wesley. We are currently exploring a significant project to replace *Visual Liturgy* and provide a new solution for those wanting "on-screen" versions of liturgy and other materials.

Support Services

Finance Office

- 21 Work continues on embedding the new payroll systems for both ministers and lay employees. Significant progress has been made in resolving various issues, and members of staff recruited in late 2016 continue to grow in their knowledge and confidence of the relevant systems and processes of the Church.
- 22 The review of employment tax arrangements for ministers and employees has continued. A review meeting took place with HMRC in January, with a follow up meeting scheduled for late March at which the results of HMRC deliberations will be received. This work is being undertaken in collaboration with the Connexional Allowances Committee, via which any necessary changes to policy or process will be implemented.

HR and Development (HR&D)

- 23 The HR&D team worked with colleagues to lead workshops at the Team Managers' Training Day in early February relating to resilience, giving/receiving feedback and the personal development review (PDR) process. Given the importance of the PDR process, with the advent of performance-related pay increases this year, learning points from the workshops are being collated and will be used for targeted guidance to managers. Significant levels of recruitment continue to be supported by the team, alongside its work administering the annual Stationing Matching and Candidating processes.
- 24 Having resolved to apply for Living Wage Employer accreditation in October 2016, the Council has now formally registered with the Living Wage Foundation, and ways as to how this is promoted are now being considered.

Facilities and Property

- 25 The Property Development Committee hosted a joint meeting with District Property Secretaries on 31 January and had its second meeting in early February. Progress on its work and that of the Property Strategy Consultant will be reported to the Council separately. The team has commenced work with the MCH Management Committee on long-term maintenance plans for the building and has also overseen the redevelopment work at 24 Somerset Road, which is due for completion in early April.

IT and database

- 26 After the appointment of an IT Manager to lead the entire function, recruitment is underway to fill the remaining posts. Analysis of future requirements relating to the Connexional database has begun. A specialist external data/process analyst has been engaged, to

undertake a scoping exercise, expected to lead to a more in-depth major piece of work that will inform future planning and expenditure.

Archives and Data Protection

- 27 Completion of the MCH refurbishment has enabled work to re-organise the basement rooms used for storage of modern archives to be undertaken, resulting in a transfer of the appropriate files to John Rylands University Library in February.
- 28 The results of a data protection audit have been received, with various recommendations now to be implemented – some at significant cost of time and money. On-line training has been procured to as part of the demonstration of our commitment to compliance on behalf of the Church. The aim is for all members of the Team to undertake this by the end of March.

Procurement

- 29 A new Procurement Manager joined the Team after a gap of two months. She will be focusing, alongside Finance colleagues, on the introduction of new Team Procurement Guidelines and also on the recommendations of the recent Internal Audit on procurement by Mazars.

The Conference Office

Arrangements for the Conference

- 30 Preparations for the meeting of the 2017 Conference are progressing well. The Conference Office is delighted that proposals for a buddy scheme between Districts and representatives from the World Church have been received with great enthusiasm. It is hoped that these arrangements will encourage broader participation in the life of the Conference and will build and strengthen relationships across the wider Church.

Ecumenical Partners

- 31 It is anticipated that, prior to the April meeting of the Council, a residential meeting of the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity and Mission in March will have taken forward work on the New Framework for Local Unity in Mission to which the Council responded formally in January.

Ongoing Work

- 32 The Conference Office continues to seek to support the life of the Methodist Church in various ways, including in the areas of safeguarding, governance, complaints and discipline, faith and order and ministerial oversight. The Council will meet immediately after the connexional Ministerial Candidates' Selection Committee; members of the Council are asked to hold those involved in this discernment process in prayer.

*****RESOLUTION**

31/1. The Council receives the report.