

Circuit Strategy for Resourcing Growth

Coventry and Nuneaton Methodist Circuit

November 2014

Introduction

We find ourselves in a difficult situation in the life of our circuit. From the questionnaire responses it is clear that our current configuration of churches and staffing is not working. Circuit staff are overloaded and some churches are feeling like they are getting a raw deal, or are feeling isolated from the rest of the circuit. This has a negative impact on the mission and ministry of the churches and the ministers. It might seem that a simple solution would be to return to past levels of staffing, i.e. more Presbyters. However, this is not an option for two clear reasons, it is not financially viable in the long term, and there are not sufficient ministers in the connexion. In addition to this, having more Presbyters still does not necessarily facilitate growth; the Circuit had higher levels of staffing for many years and this didn't prevent the decline that has brought us to the crisis we face today.

Past attempts to deal with this crisis have not worked. The JLC process, although agreed by the Circuit Meeting, was not whole-heartedly adopted by local congregations and therefore was doomed to fail from the outset. The process outlined in this document and to be presented at the Extraordinary Circuit Meeting on 6th November is an attempt to deal with some of the long-term issues and resolve the short-term crisis in partnership with the Local Churches and rebuild some of the damaged relationships within the circuit.

The aim

The ultimate aim is growth as defined in previous reports to the circuit meeting as growth in depth, numbers and the outworking of discipleship. In order for this to be facilitated in the long-term the other aim is to have sustainable staffing levels that help to facilitate growth across the circuit.

Targeted ministry

The Circuit has the responsibility to resource and equip the local churches in their mission and ministry. The nature and the amount of these resources will look different depending on what the mission of a local church entails. Therefore, the CLT is proposing that all the Church Councils can opt into a particular stream. Each stream has a specific aim and the circuit will resource the local church to achieve that aim. Some of these streams focused on growth are indefinite and long-term

and therefore do not have specific short-term targets. Others, however, are working towards a specific end and therefore are time limited.

One way in which the Circuit resources and equips the local Churches is through ministers and other Circuit staff. Over the last few years, the Circuit Finance Team has worked hard to produce appropriate and sustainable budgets to safeguard the longterm mission of the Circuit. The current Presbyteral staffing level of four is a result of this process. Local Church assessments finance our Circuit and are based on each Local Church's unrestricted income. As we continue to explore the best way of using our resources this model of finance and assessments will continue.

The hope is that within this model churches might be well resourced to achieve specific aims in the short-term which will then result in a more manageable circuit.

The responsibility lies with the local church councils to decide which stream they would like to opt into. In response the circuit will facilitate and resource accordingly.

Prayerful discernment: Led by God's Spirit

The CLT assure the Circuit that they have been, and continue to be committed to prayerful and thoughtful consideration of this process and to be open to the Holy Spirit moving in and through the Methodist people of Coventry and Nuneaton in working out God's plan. The work of God in this Circuit is not something to be considered lightly or carelessly and as disciples of Christ we recognise our obligation to actively seek the will of God. Our invitation to the Circuit, as churches and as individuals, is for you too, to take care to discern God's plan by holding this process in prayer: the conversations and decisions. We believe that a response which comes from a place of prayer, bible study and worship is one through which we can and will honour God, and the Church and the work and mission of the people called Methodist in this circuit.

Stream 1: “Going for Growth”

Introduction

This is a long-term stream in which a local church is actively running projects, and is offering worship, which is “going for growth.” The questionnaire responses would indicate that a number of our churches have begun to “go for growth” and to implement the necessary changes. The long-term plan is that all churches would fall into this category.

Churches selecting this stream must be able to offer objective evidence of growth in depth, numbers and outworking to the CLT and to demonstrate an ongoing willingness to change and develop their mission.

Aim

Continued growth in depth, numbers and the outworking of discipleship.

Circuit Resources

The Circuit will seek to support the growth through:

- Regular contact from the Presbyter in pastoral charge in worship and meetings will be a priority
- Providing presbyters to lead communion services at least once a month
- The possibility of lay-workers to help in specific areas
- Providing local preachers and supernumerary ministers to lead worship when the Presbyter in pastoral charge is not available.

The church council commits to

- A continued process of change
- On-going self assessment.

Stream 2: “Planning for Growth”

Introduction

For some Churches in the Circuit it appears that there is a willingness to grow but a lack of ideas, resources, or understanding to make the necessary changes in order to facilitate growth. This stream is designed to lead to the “Going for Growth” stream in that it is around planning and preparing for being a growing Church. Churches on this stream would likely be running good activities but not with specific aims focused on growth.

Aim

To become a church that is growing in depth, numbers and the outworking of discipleship.

Circuit Resources

The Circuit will seek to support the growth through:

- Running a mission shaped introduction course with members of the congregation designed to help the church itself identify mission and plan for growth. The course would be led by the Presbyterian in pastoral charge of the Church and the District Evangelism Enabler Michele Simms
- Regular contact from the Presbyterian in pastoral charge in worship
- Providing a communion service once a month
- Chairing from the Presbyterian in pastoral charge at church meetings (Church Councils etc.) only when growth is on the agenda
- A sermon series on mission and growth lead by Local Preachers.

The church council commits to

- A process of change
- Attendance of the stewards and a majority of the church council members at the Mission Shaped Introduction course.

Stream 3: “Mission Accomplished”

Introduction

Some churches in our circuit are unable to focus on growth because just “keeping the show on the road” is proving to be a difficult task. Indicators of this might be:

- A difficulty filling key offices such as treasurer, church council secretary, stewards etc.
- All the key offices occupied by the same one or two people
- A lack of new projects / groups.
- A lack of younger people including children who are actively engaging with the ministry and mission of the church.

This option has a short-term target of the society ceasing to worship in this place, but doing this in a good way, celebrating the great work over many years, and enabling the members of the congregation to continue their journey of discipleship elsewhere. This option is not giving up, but simply saying that God’s work here is done - “Mission Accomplished”.

Aim

For the Church to cease to meet within 18 months and to facilitate a good ending to the life of the Church.

Circuit Resources

The Circuit will seek to support this aim through:

- Providing a specialist team to help plan and run a program of events leading to the closure of the church, celebrating the life of the church and facilitating a good ending
- Extra one-to-one contact from members of the specialist team to support all members of the congregation to continue their journey of discipleship at another Local Church
- Communion once a month
- A sermon series on death and resurrection lead by Local Preachers
- Chairing of all the Church meetings by the Presbyterian in pastoral charge to facilitate the good ending.

The church council commits to

- Ceasing to worship within 18 months.

Stream 4: “Sustainable Presence Ministry”

Introduction

For some churches it would seem that the mission and ministry centres around the building as a presence within the community. This ministry could include a high number of weddings, baptisms and funerals. In this instance it may be difficult to pin-point growth, but there may be a sense that the building needs to remain under the control of the Methodist Church. It is likely that a church that would want to choose this option is also not in a position to be able to facilitate growth due to a lack of lay leaders with energy. As with stream three, indicators of this are as follows:

- A difficulty filling key offices such as treasurer, church council secretary, stewards etc.
- All the key offices occupied by the same one or two people
- A lack of new projects / groups.
- A lack of younger people including children who are actively engaging with the ministry and mission of the church.

Under this stream regular worship services may continue as Local Arrangements, or a cell group, and the building would remain available for wedding, baptisms and funerals. The financial viability and implications would be considered by the Church Council of which the old society would be a class.

Aim

For the building to remain open, but the society become a class of another, larger local Methodist Church within 6 months.

Circuit Resources

The Circuit will seek to support this aim through:

- Chairing of all the Church meetings to facilitate the amalgamation.
- A sermon series on death and resurrection lead by Local Preachers.
- Extra contact from the Presbyter in pastoral charge / other gifted lay people to support all members of the congregation to understand the process of amalgamation.

The church council commits to

- “Ceasing to meet” for worship as a society and becoming a class of another Local Church within 6 months.

Stream 5: “None of the above”

Introduction

If a Local Church is not willing to engage with any of the other streams then there is the possibility of “opting out”. This option is not the same as continuing as is currently the case - this is simply not an option due to the lack of Circuit resources.

As the Circuit can only afford to resource certain things this will mean that input into the life of the church will reduce to communion once a quarter and the Superintendent may appoint a Lay Person to chair all the Church meetings (in accordance with SO 502) and then report back to the Circuit Leadership Team.

Next Steps

This proposal will go to the Extra-ordinary Circuit Meeting in November 2014 and will go to a vote.

If adopted, each Church Council will have a choice. by a vote, as to which stream they would like to adopt. The Circuit will then respond to the local decisions with the resources outlined in each stream above.