



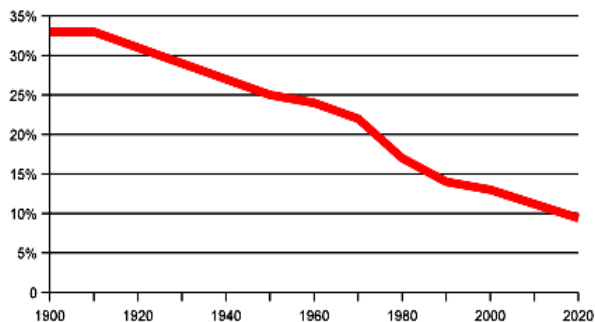
# Circuit Mission Plan

## 1. Introduction and background

### A. The challenge

Membership in the Wirral Circuit declined from 2089 members in 2009 to 1600 members in 2014, and by 2019 was 1,181 plus 247 in the Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The number of active members is significantly smaller. Across the Connexion 69% of our members are over 66 years of age and the Circuit's profile is likely to be the same. This mirrors a general decline in church attendance from the early 20th century, accelerating since 1970.

Figure 2: Percentage of the Population who are Church Members 1900-2020



"Religion in Britain has suffered an immense general decline since the 1950s. Between 1979 and 2005, half of all Christians stopped going to church on a Sunday (*Religion in the United Kingdom Diversity, Trends and Decline* -

<http://www.vexen.co.uk/UK/religion.html>). There are areas of the church which are flourishing, but "all indicators show a continued secularisation of British society in line with other European countries such as France." (from *UK Christianity 2005-2015*,

Peter Brierley [www.brierleyconsultancy.com](http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com))

For the Wirral Methodist Churches, there are significant practical challenges in terms of full-time staffing, local church administration, the maintenance of facilities and the prudent planning for a continued decline, should these trends continue. More so, however, it is our responsibility to address the greater challenge of calling people in our communities to faith in Jesus, and to serving our generation with joy and hope.

### B. The hope

"Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it has a god who knows the way out of the grave." (G.K. Chesterton). Our Circuit family will face many challenges in the next few years and we will have to find new ways of using our resources to serve God, but we must move forward in confidence with a God who knows the way.

### C. The plan

This plan has been prepared following careful scrutiny of the individual plans of each church. We have listened to the needs and vision of the churches, and listed the strategic actions which we believe the Circuit should take to help ensure that there is a thriving and witnessing Methodist presence on the Wirral but, more importantly, that the kingdom of God is growing in our communities.

## 2. 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. It does this through Worship; Learning & Caring; Service; Evangelism.

## 3. Mission Statement

The Circuit exists to support the churches in God's mission. We are passionate about learning and growing together, celebrating the love of God, sharing the life of God with those around us and with those in need around the world and bringing our neighbours to Christ.

## 4. Vision

A network of growing churches, characterised by clear vision, vibrant and accessible worship, discipleship and love for one another, committed to serving and witnessing within our communities, and with strong and supportive links among ourselves and with other churches and agencies.

## 5. Aims and Objectives

A. Plan and lead: establish a viable and vibrant circuit of churches.

A1. Identify those churches which have the vision and resources to grow the kingdom in their communities.

*Review, monitor and evaluate church mission plans. Help churches to carefully consider their vision and strategies and decide whether their plans and ideas are realistic within their available resources. Work with church councils to enable them to make firm plans for their future, whether for missional growth or for finding new ways of functioning as a Christian community.*

A2. Come alongside churches which become unviable, and help them to merge, close or find new ways of functioning in their communities.

*Work with church councils to enable them to support their members, explore what it means to be a congregation without a building, and find supportive links and resources within their neighbourhood or in other Methodist churches.*

A3. Identify opportunities for outreach in communities which have no Christian presence, and ways of staffing and resourcing such work.

*Research areas of need and opportunity; work with the Methodist Church at District and national level to gain the resources for new initiatives (for example, Pioneer ministries), and invest from within the circuit where possible.*

## B. Support and equip: work together to grow and thrive.

B1. Recruit, train and support ministers, staff, lay pastors, local preachers and leaders to meet the needs of churches and communities.

*Establish priorities for the recruitment and allocation of paid lay staff. Develop the Lay Pastors programme, and move towards having a Lay Pastor (or an active leadership team) in each church. Enhance the training of Local Preachers to meet the changing needs of the churches where they serve (see below). Encourage church councils to understand and enhance their leadership role in the churches. Support and encourage ministers and staff through these changes.*

B2. Build a mutually supportive network of churches; promote joint working and the sharing of ideas and expertise between churches in the various groups, across the circuit and across denominations.

*Develop closer links between churches in each group, and with other churches in our communities, particularly as questions of viability are being addressed. Identify churches which can offer leadership in the circuit in particular areas of work. Encourage links between churches with similar needs, goals, vision and approach.*

B3. Enable churches to access appropriate resources, training and consultancy to achieve their goals.

*See section 6 for a discussion of the resourcing, support and training needs identified by the churches.*

## C. Govern and administer: organise ourselves for effectiveness.

C1. Ensure that all churches fulfil their governance responsibilities, for example in respect of financial accountability and safeguarding.

*These will always be priorities for the circuit, and we need to maintain effective controls in these areas.*

C2. Reduce the administrative burden on ministers and church councils by the adoption of new governance and trusteeship models.

*We understand that changes which are currently in process will enable more efficient and effective governance and trusteeship, and will free up time and energy for all. Churches will need to be guided through these changes. We may also wish to consider moving towards simplifying and merging church finances where this is possible and acceptable.*

C3. Manage the human and financial resources of the Circuit effectively: safeguard the health and well-being of ministers, paid employees and lay leaders in all the various roles across the churches.

*There are existing systems for supervision, mentoring and buddying. It will be helpful to review these and seek to avoid burnout at all levels. Some of the changes proposed will have a positive impact on ministers' and staff workload, but demands are sure to increase in other areas.*

## 6. Growing and Thriving

*We asked the churches to assess their priorities in respect of the four areas of Our Calling. These were the commonalities which emerged as steps towards growing and thriving churches.*

### A. Worship

#### **Church priorities**

1. Offer alternative forms of worship which are more likely to meet the needs of those outside of and connected to the church who do not currently find services to be meaningful.
2. Continue and develop online and hybrid forms of worship to serve those who are housebound, and to reach others outside the church.
3. Be more deliberate about the form and content of services in order to meet the mission and discipleship aims of the church.

#### **How the circuit can help**

A1: Support and enable the development of flexible and accessible worship opportunities across our churches.

*This could involve a range of options and activities: offering training and support to churches in opening up new forms of worship; having a few “hubs” where there are regular worship events (such as the New Song Café at Hope Farm); building cross-church links for sharing worship in a range of styles and formats.*

A2: Provide technical help and advice to churches who want to expand and improve their online and hybrid services.

*There are several people in and around the circuit who have substantial skills and experience which can be made available to churches. We need to research who is out there, and maintain a list of those who can be called on. There is a District initiative to support IT across the circuits, which we should also tap into.*

A3: Train and equip local preachers to meet the needs and programmes of churches to which they are assigned, and encourage dialogue between churches and preachers.

*Several churches commented that they wished to have more interaction with LPs and prepare them to align with the church’s teaching objectives and worship style. Already much thought is given to preaching appointments, but as churches look to open up more to their communities and pursue specific aims in terms of congregational growth, that may need further attention.*

### B. Learning and Caring

#### **Church priorities**

1. Enable growth, learning and pastoral support through small groups.
2. Ensure that older members receive a high level of pastoral care.

### ***How the circuit can help***

B1. Promote and support the development of a network of small groups.

*We want to enable growth in discipleship and the ideal of “everyone an evangelist” through relationships, study and prayer. Actions may include training and equipping leaders, identifying appropriate materials, and establishing some online groups for those who can’t meet physically.*

B2. Keep the pastoral care systems in each church under review, and encourage more members to be involved in caring for one another.

*This is something which is already happening to a high degree in most of our churches. The Circuit, in particular the ministers and lay leaders, should keep this under review as many of our pastoral visitors are coming towards the end of their ministry in this area.*

## **C. Service**

### ***Church priorities***

1. Reach out to people within our communities who are lonely, isolated and suffering from mental health issues; to create places of welcome in our buildings.
2. Build local alliances and work towards the alleviation of poverty and deprivation.

### ***How the circuit can help***

C1. Identify churches (within and outside the Circuit) which have effective programmes and make their knowledge and experience available to other churches.

*This is one of the most cited needs in the church mission plans. It would be good for the Circuit to create a mechanism for pooling ideas and supporting initiatives across churches.*

C2. Build links with local councils, NGOs and volunteer networks across the Wirral to support the work of churches in their communities, particularly in areas of deprivation.

*A number of churches work closely with local agencies, and wish to expand that partnership in order to meet shared objectives. At the Circuit level, there may be opportunities to promote alliances across Wirral.*

C3. Support and enable the expansion of FUSS/FUPS across the Wirral churches.

*A number of churches value their links with this project, and others express a wish to incorporate it into their social action in the community.*

## **D. Evangelism**

### ***Church priorities***

1. Reach out to children, families and schools.
2. Create “gateway” activities and events and enable church members to build relationships with others in the community.
3. Teach and equip members to share their faith – “everyone an evangelist”.

### ***How the circuit can help***

D1. Enhance and support the work of the Children and Families team.

*This is the most frequently cited need among the churches. There is widespread acknowledgement that this area of work is critical for the future of the church, but there is a serious lack of people and skills in the churches.*

D2. Communicate and share ideas and experiments via print, social media and meetings with churches. Evaluate national and district initiatives and consider how they can best be implemented in the Wirral Circuit.

D3. Build a shared vision across the churches through occasional special events for training, equipping and envisioning, such as the District 2020 Vision event and the Circuit Awayday in 2019. *Although some report that their members have gone as far as they are likely to go in discipleship, many are ready to learn and are well aware of the need to evangelise in our communities.*

D4. Establish at least one new community.

## **7. Responsibilities and action plans**

Responsibility for carrying out this plan will lie with the circuit stewards and the CLT, working together with the Superintendent. Action plans will be written for each area of responsibility.

*We will look into reconfiguring our circuit committees to reflect these aims and priorities:*

*Worship, learning and caring*

*Service & evangelism*

*Strategy, communications and planning*

*Governance, property, finance and administration*

*The most pressing need is for a careful review of church mission plans and dialogue with the churches about how they see their future, and what they are looking for from the circuit. This will lead prompt some difficult decisions about resources and viability. This will largely be in the hands of the circuit stewards and ministers.*

## **8. Outcomes/Measures**

The CLT will determine how the progress of the plan should be measured, and the outcomes evaluated.

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