

Ashton under Lyne Methodist Circuit Review
Report by Transforming Churches & Communities

Priorities for Action 2017 – 2020 and beyond

The Ashton-under-Lyne Methodist Circuit has spent time in consultation and conversations between Circuit Leadership, Staff and Churches – looking at its current situation and context and trying to prioritise where its resources might best be used over the next five to ten years so as to achieve a Circuit that can:

- prayerfully discern the work of God that the Methodist people are called to do
- work together in co-operation with one another – valuing our inter-connectedness

and in doing this we would also expect to develop strong, committed Christian communities that have a real sense of discipleship along with a heart for mission.

There are three main areas of support identified within the work carried out by Rev. Rod Hill and the follow up work carried out by Transforming Churches and Communities are:

1. Worship and Discipleship

2. Outreach

3. Governance

1. Worship and Discipleship

Priority: each member of a church community should have ample opportunity to develop their discipleship in a variety of ways.

It was revealed that there was a lot of good work already going on within the Circuit but it was difficult to see how the Circuit acts as one body or has a common vision. It was also suggested that the Circuit should make available different styles of worship for different groups.

2. Outreach

Church members should become skilled and confident in reaching out beyond their existing congregations and buildings to share the Good News in a way that is attractive and appealing.

Conversations revealed that people have a sense that they could be doing more, but feel that they lack capacity, confidence and skills.

3. Governance

The organisation and structure of the Circuit should enable the priorities to be met by individual churches acting alone; as a part of a Mission Enabled Community; and as part of the Circuit. There are also issues in relation to the practical and legal aspects of governance.

The Circuit to provide good practice guidelines for:

- creating, adopting and reviewing policies and procedures.
- a system for supporting churches to complete the statutory reporting around finance, including Standard Form of Accounts and Reserves (the policy on reserves is required to be 'signed off' by the Circuit)
- ensuring all other insurance, licence and legal issues are in place, for example; contracts of employment.

Reshaping for Mission

Encourage local churches to work in partnerships which make geographical sense in terms of the emerging priorities and challenges faced by those churches.

- Hurst, Waterloo, and Mossley
- West End and Trinity
- Stalybridge and Dukinfield

In some cases the appropriate governance model may be that there is one Church Council for each 'section'; as a minimum there should be joint meetings to develop missional and discipleship opportunities.

There may be a need to re-organise the staff resources in line with this, but keeping in mind that having three Church Councils rather than seven will have a significant saving in people's time, there is a lot more work to do in terms of outreach etc.

The Circuit needs to develop a process for identifying the criteria for churches to consider in terms of their members, buildings and finance for future sustainability.

- What is the critical point for membership of a church?
- What is the cost/benefit ratio for major repairs to buildings?
- At what point does a church become unviable in financial terms?

Information from the RAG ratings, responses from the congregation and other paperwork an assessment of each Church/building has been placed in a table overleaf.

Church/Building	Dukinfield	Hurst	Mossley	Stalybridge	Stamford Street	Trinity	Waterloo	West End
Option								
1. Do nothing	Close in 5/10 years (building/ membership)	Survive	Survive	Survive		Survive	Close in 5/10 years (membership)	Close within 5 years (membership)
2. Fulfil Recommendations	Survive for 10/15 years	Grow	Grow	Grow		Grow	Survive for 10/15 years	Survive for marginally more than 5 years
3. Close	Consideration should be given on membership and building issues	No, unless to move to a new building	No, unless to move to a new building	No, unless to move to a new building	Significant governance issues (not fulfilling place of worship criteria)	No	Consideration should be given on membership and capacity to keep going	Significant issues over membership and capacity

The Circuit needs to consider a number of options in relation to the buildings.

Closing Churches is not an easy process; however, there appears to be a realisation that this may become inevitable, the issues are highlighted in the above table. It is impossible to predict the cost implications as they are so varied, but to not do anything will eventually impact on the Circuit's ability to function, financially and lack of capacity to govern.

Further work needs to be carried out but scenarios could be as follows:

1. Stamford Street, West End, Waterloo and Dukinfield have a managed closure and the members become members of a Church of their choice.
2. Trinity and Mossley remain as they are with the remaining Churches forming one Church in the southern Ashton, west Stalybridge area. The five other Church memberships come together formally but individuals will still have a choice of where they worship.

There are not so obvious options, such as one Church for the whole Circuit, or reducing the size of the Circuit by Churches joining neighbouring Circuits, again more work and thought would need to be undertaken in this area.