

Ashton under Lyne Methodist Circuit Review
Response by the Circuit Leadership Team

Priorities for Action 2017 – 2020 and beyond

At creation the Spirit brooded over the waters before bringing order out of chaos.

The Circuit Leadership Team has spent much time 'brooding'. That is reflecting, consulting, prayerfully exploring the findings of the full report from Transforming Churches and Communities (TCC) and seeking to discern ways in which we can share in God's mission through the life and work of the Circuit.

In addition we have researched the mission focused work being carried out in other Circuits (like the development of Centres of Mission in the Hull Circuit), we have talked with the leaders of other Christian Denominations working within this part of Tameside and we have begun to consider closer ways of working with the neighbouring Circuits of Hyde & Denton and Glossop. We have also fed into our discussions the advice received from the Chair of District with regards to the stationing of ministers throughout the Connexion. As stewards of the Circuit's finances we are aware that we have considerable but finite resources and seek to use them wisely in God's service.

Throughout all of this we have sought to keep the Circuit vision statement as the lens through which our priorities come into focus:

Worshipping God

to offer a range of high quality worship that honours God
to resource and deepen discipleship

Serving our community

to use our buildings as hospitable spaces
to reach out to those who may be vulnerable

Caring for all in Jesus name

to develop intergenerational lifelong care
to serve alongside our ecumenical partners

The '*order*' that has emerged from this '*chaos*' is the following proposal ...

The Ashton under Lyne Circuit focuses upon developing four strong, sustainable 'Centres of Mission' with the following characteristics:

- Worshipping God with integrity – the key activity from which the mission flows
- Making new disciples and growing in discipleship
- Establishing fresh expressions of church and church planting
- Initiatives in Mission Shaped Ministry (*see the flier about the upcoming course*)
- Community focused social action
- Work with families, young people, children and older people
- Reaching the missing generations
- Building community cohesion

It is proposed that our four 'Centres of Mission' be formed thus:

Partnership between Waterloo and Hurst, including Rosehill

The congregations of Waterloo and Hurst Methodist Churches would be encouraged to work closely together, supporting one another in exploring the mission characteristics listed above. This could include some joint services – perhaps held at Rosehill – as well as consideration of how the existing buildings can be further used for missional outreach, for example the setting up of a Godly Play classroom at Hurst.

To actively build upon the close working relationship with the United Reformed Church.

Trinity, Audenshaw – working with West End

West End Methodist Church now fulfils the criteria for being a 'class' rather than a church, so it is proposed that the faithful members there work alongside Trinity whilst options for continuing our work in that area are further explored. Community involvement in Audenshaw and the West End area of Ashton to be given key priority in the exploration of the ways in which the mission characteristics listed above can be embodied through Trinity Church. Support and training to be provided for lay leadership, alongside continued support from Methodist and URC ministers.

Partnership between Dukinfield and Stalybridge

The congregations of Dukinfield and Stalybridge Methodist Churches are encouraged to work closely together to support one another as they address major issues with their buildings and consider the best ways to meet the needs of the areas in which they are located.

Mossley

To continue with the ecumenical and community links already established in Mossley, with a renewed emphasis on growth in discipleship and opportunities to share faith in line with the missional characteristics listed above.

Other key proposals:

Empowering church members for mission

Coordinating a wide ranging programme of training and support for the ways in which members put their faith into action in their everyday lives and through the ministries of the church. This would include study and retreat days as well as a variety of short and more in depth courses.

Chaplaincy

The Circuit as a whole to consider ways to support the existing work in the hospital (perhaps with volunteers to support the chaplaincy by leading Sunday afternoon worship once a quarter) and town centre mission through training in chaplaincy and opportunities to 'have a go' at this form of ministry/witness.

Enriching worship

Using Circuit Services as an opportunity to enable people to experience different approaches to worship, placing key emphasis on the continual development of our preachers and worship leaders.

Community focused social action

We could consider adding an additional day to the work undertaken by the Carpenters Arms, or a similar project, possibly adapting one of our buildings for this purpose e.g. installing showers.

Stamford Street

The Management Group of the Stamford Street Church Hall have been 'good and faithful servants' in running a valuable community resource – however, the findings of the Circuit Review have shown that now is the time to close and sell the hall.

Staffing

It is unlikely that there will be enough ordained ministers in the stationing process for this Circuit to require three manses again. Future models of staffing should focus on 'ministries not ministers' and incorporate lay workers with clearly defined roles. Ministerial responsibilities to be reassessed in order to best serve the four 'Centres of Mission'.

Releasing resources for mission

The sale of Stamford Street and the money currently ring-fenced for the purchase of a new manse would be released for the mission of the Circuit. Criteria would be established so that churches, or Circuit groups, could apply for funding to help them fulfil the characteristics listed on page 1.

Reflecting theologically

We have already identified the motif of creation at work – God's Spirit brooding over the waters, ultimately bringing order out of chaos (Genesis 1). The process we are engaged in will also involve considerable pruning and grafting (John 15) and the bereavement of endings and farewells. Without undermining the silence and pain of Holy Saturday we know that ultimately death leads to new life – resurrection. The four 'Centres of Mission' will each need to ask important questions about their identity – and may even require new names (Genesis 17:5, John 1:42).

The next steps

Everyone needs a chance to digest these proposals and discuss them further. Churches that are being asked to work more closely together are invited to call joint meetings so that practical details can begin to be addressed.

A further extraordinary Circuit Meeting can then be called to prayerfully decide how we take these ideas forward and to vote on these significant changes.