

## The Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

### Our Strategy for Mission and Ministry

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is an update (24/07/24) to a document first agreed by the Circuit Meeting in December 2019, following approval of the Circuit strategy in March 2019.
- 1.2. The Circuit vision remains the same. It is to enable us all to worship God and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our mission is to share fellowship and resources across the Circuit, develop a sense of belonging so that we can build each other up and consider, develop and unlock opportunities for mission.
- 1.3. As a Circuit we remain committed to promoting 'A Methodist Way of Life'<sup>1</sup>, and a 'Justice Seeking Church'<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.4. However, since 2019 the context in which we carry out our mission and ministry has changed. The full impact of the global pandemic has now become apparent (upon people's health, living standards, and outlook), and the escalation of wars in the Ukraine and in Israel/Palestine (that have devastated local communities) have had a further impact on the world community. Elections in the UK (Europe and the USA) have led to a period of further self-reflection and change.
- 1.5. Against this backdrop of events, it feels appropriate to update the strategy as the needs of our communities have changed. This also feels appropriate because we have made significant progress in certain areas of the strategy (including our people - both lay and ordained, our finances and our property), enabling new learning about the way forward. This document should be understood therefore as a development upon earlier versions of the strategy documents.

#### 2. Our People

##### 2.1. Our members

- 2.1.1. The total Circuit membership has declined from 1097 in 2019 to 971 in 2022, and attendance has declined from 665 to 645 respectively (including 88 worshipping live online and at our LEP's).
- 2.1.2. This represents a reduction in the people resources available to churches, for maintenance and governance as well as mission and ministry. One of the most pressing challenges for all churches is the availability of people to undertake roles necessary for a church to function (something that also applies to the Circuit, District, and Connexion). Many members are giving their time sacrificially, holding several roles in churches and across the Circuit, but with ageing congregations this situation is not going to improve unless there is growth.
- 2.1.3. One significant change from our original strategy therefore is the hope that our actions (and our focus going forward) results in growth – growth in spirituality, in mission, in membership and attendance, and a corresponding growth in both volunteers and finances for our work for the Kingdom of God.

##### 2.2. Ordained and Lay Staff

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/>;

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/>

- 2.2.1. Our Circuit ministerial staff currently comprises two full time<sup>3</sup> and one part time (75%) presbyters<sup>4</sup>, a minister of the United Reformed Church at The United Church Winchester LEP, and an Anglican minister at St Francis, Valley Park LEP. We were successful during Stationing (2023/24) in making an appointment of a new presbyter starting in September 2024 (taking the number of full-time presbyters back up to three) to serve Romsey and provide leadership for the Southern Area Ministry team, including Cadnam and Landford.
- 2.2.2. We have three Local Lay Pastors who serve in Alresford, Cadnam and Landford. These recent appointments are viewed as having been a great success, providing a flexible and important local resource to the Area Ministry Teams. We also have youth and family workers at Chandler's Ford and Romsey respectively, a Circuit Youth Officer, two Lay Pastoral Assistants, and a part-time Circuit administrator.
- 2.2.3. Given the national shortage of Presbyters, and the limited number of volunteers available in our churches due to the smaller and ageing membership, we plan to continue to invest further resources in lay employees.

### 2.3. Area Ministry Teams

- 2.3.1. A key element of our strategy is to establish Area Ministry Teams, in response to fewer presbyters being available through Stationing, and the need to flexibly and cost effectively serve our smaller churches. This involves presbyters, local pastors and pastoral assistants working cooperatively in teams across specified areas to support each other and share the ministry and mission work agreed with the churches and Circuit. Each church continues to have a named minister, with oversight of Area Ministry Teams being the responsibility of the Circuit Leadership Team.
- 2.3.2. To date some progress has been made in the establishment of these Area Ministry Teams but much more work remains to be done – including more sharing of resources, more coordination, and more support between members of each team.
- 2.3.3. More work also is needed on our Human Resource systems to ensure our staff are better supported, and we are therefore starting a review of such practices. This is likely to focus on such things as Development and Supervision, Pastoral Support, Lay Employment Contracts, and Staff Planning.

### 2.4. Youth and Children's Work

- 2.4.1. A Circuit-wide strategy for youth and children's work has been developed (and agreed by the Circuit Meeting in June 2022) including priorities for the Children and Youth Workers. This strategy makes it clear that the important task of engaging with young people is the responsibility of church ministry teams, supported by our employed youth and family workers. There continues to be good work circuit-wide and those churches working with children and young people receive excellent support, including where appropriate funding from the Circuit.

### 2.5. Resourcing Worship

- 2.5.1. A significant resource available to us is the commitment of Local Preachers who enable us to provide regular worship in our churches across the Circuit, along with the Worship Leaders who serve individual churches. Although the pandemic initially resulted in a significant loss of people available to lead worship several have since resumed active public ministry. However, the shortage of preachers available for Plan-making remains a challenge to be fully addressed.

---

<sup>3</sup> One at Wesley, Weeke with King's Somborne, and Alresford; one at Chandlers Ford and Colden Common with Twyford

<sup>4</sup> Our presbyter at St Andrews, and Bishopstoke (is temporarily 100% whilst providing oversight of Romsey).

- 2.5.2. We continue to operate a policy of each church having at least one Local Arrangement each quarter to cover these services. A collection of worship resources has been developed for use in Local Arrangements and are downloadable from the Circuit website.
- 2.5.3. Several churches offer online worship (on streaming, catch-up, and via Zoom), and the 'Service at Home sheet' is produced weekly and circulated in hard copy format or online. These two provisions are making a real difference both to those who are housebound and to those who value having an additional service to use at home on Sundays or during the week.
- 2.5.4. Two of our Local Preachers are authorized to preside at Holy Communion (we will in future consider passing on these roles to other Local Preachers) , and it is likely this requirement will continue until further notice.

### **3. Finance**

- 3.1. There are five sources of financial resources available to this Circuit and its churches: properties, cash in the bank and investments, income from lettings, the gifts from our congregations, and grant-making organisations (it should be noted that grant applications are largely for new or exceptional work, usually requiring significant local funding, and where projects need to become self-funding after 3-5 years).
- 3.2. Churches across the Circuit have seen their income fall (money received from congregation members is declining and letting income is down). Additionally, the impact of higher inflation, seen particularly with high energy costs, is a cause for concern. Gift days and fellowship events for fund raising continue to help, but largely for one off projects. Whilst Churches remain responsible for their finances, the Circuit has set aside funds, as reported in the Circuit Reserve Policy, to support Grant Applications received from Circuit churches.
- 3.3. Generating additional Circuit income to support and invest in our Mission and Ministry (both lay workers and upgrades to our church buildings) is therefore now seen as an important part of our strategy. Much of this opportunity depends upon the release of funds from letting or selling our surplus properties (see the property section below).

### **4. Property**

- 4.1. Within the Circuit, there are 13 church buildings, across 11 churches (including 2 LEP's whose buildings are owned by the URC and CoE respectively) and 5 manses. Church Councils and the Circuit Meeting are the local managing trustees, but all our buildings belong to the Methodist Church, and we hold them in trust.
- 4.2. The Circuit Leadership Team have recently undertaken a review of our property strategy and the highlights of this (approved by the Circuit Meeting in June 2024) are as follows:
  - 4.2.1. There are three principles that will guide our property decisions:
    - 4.2.1.1. We should (for now) retain all our existing manses – and where we have surplus properties use them to provide income to support the ministry and mission within the Circuit (e.g. to support the provision of Local Pastors).
    - 4.2.1.2. Where we have churches which are closed for worship, and having considered whether they should be repurposed or not, where they are surplus to our requirements they should be sold (having followed the Connexion due process). In such cases we will actively and intentionally seek to reuse any funds received from the Connexion to support ministry and mission within the Circuit.
    - 4.2.1.3. Any investments the Circuit makes should address a clear need and be targeted to make a lasting impact upon the communities that we serve.
  - 4.2.2. Where funds become available through the letting or sale of surplus properties, we propose to prioritise their use in the following four areas:
    - 4.2.2.1. Building Redevelopment or New Locations. This should include major schemes of work in locations where we have decided to prioritise ministry and mission but where

our buildings currently do not support this. In the future this might also include new locations for churches.

4.2.2.2. Eco Church. Many churches are struggling with high energy costs and inefficient heating and lighting systems. Also, the Connexion has established a target of 'becoming a net zero emissions Church by 2030'. If churches are to address these dual challenges support is going to be required from the Circuit and / or District (including the recently announced Action for Hope grants).

4.2.2.3. Support for Ministry. Our Circuit Strategy describes a more flexible approach to ministry in the future. This includes establishing Area Ministry teams and the increased use of lay workers to support ordained colleagues.

4.2.2.4. Support for Mission. Church Surveys make it clear that there are vitally important and incredibly diverse missional activities going on in our churches, established to support our local communities. These surveys point to the importance of continuing and increasing our support in two areas of mission:

4.2.2.4.1. Support for young families – including attracting them back to our churches (as a future source of growth and evangelism).

4.2.2.4.2. Support for older people – our communities and our churches have an ageing population with specific health, mobility, and social needs.

4.2.3. That is not to say these are the only areas of mission requiring support – but they are areas clearly identified within the church surveys undertaken and are areas where we as a Circuit have experience and expertise that can be shared across the churches within the Circuit, and thereby make a lasting difference to our communities.

4.3. Following the example we have followed for finance; our strategy is to reduce the size of the Circuit Property Steward role by outsourcing key elements of the work to a professional company to reduce the size and burden of this important trustee role. The Circuit Meeting (September 2022) approved an arrangement with Savills, Winchester, to provide support as follows:

4.3.1. Property Services for Manses occupied by Ministers, including a dedicated point of contact for property maintenance issues, approved contractor numbers for out of hours emergencies, arranging for approved contractors to be engaged, and works costing up to £250 + VAT pre-approved to avoid delays.

4.3.2. Advice/guidance for Church Property Stewards, including access to our point of contact for property maintenance issues, access to list of approved contractors, contractor 'emergency' details for out of hours calls.

4.3.3. Quinquennials for Manses & Churches, pre-agreed pricing & dates, and churches free to choose their own provider.

4.3.4. Projects (Redevelopment or Disposals), including a dedicated point of contact, with linkage to TMCP, priced case by case.

4.4. The letting of vacant manses will continue to be handled by Hellards Estate Agents. The following requirements apply:

4.4.1. Any Manse available for letting must be made 'as good as it can be' (clean and to a good quality).

4.4.2. There is a desired EPC rating of C for all Manses, with an action plan to be agreed for any Manse with an EPC rating below C.

4.4.3. Outside space to be low maintenance.

4.4.4. When a Manse is to become vacant, the help of the Manse Steward will be enlisted to formulate an outline budget for approval by the Finance Group for any work required to maintain standards.

## 5. Net Zero Pathways

- 5.1. In 2020, the Circuit became the first to be awarded an Eco Circuit Bronze Award by A Rocha UK. Since then, a further two churches have received Eco Church awards.
- 5.2. The Circuit has established annual reporting of grid energy consumption and generation. We will now introduce estimation of carbon footprints of energy on a step to the adoption of 360Carbon monitoring<sup>5</sup> and development of carbon plans. We will also seek to embed environmental issues more widely into ongoing training, especially of leaders of worship.
- 5.3. In addition to the circuit-wide on-line meeting of treasurers and property stewards to consider buildings-related matters, an on-line Eco Circuit sharing group will be established to provide support for the other aspects of the Eco Church survey: worship and teaching, community and global engagement and lifestyle.

**6. Mission and Fellowship, and LEP churches**

- 6.1. In several circuits and districts across the Connexion, churches have been designated as Centres of Mission or Centres of Fellowship. We have done the same, noting the following.
- 6.2. In March 2020, the Circuit Meeting agreed that every church is a Fellowship centre and will need to manage their own property, finance, Safeguarding and governance. If this is not possible, or membership drops below 12, they will be helped if they so wish, to find alternative meeting premises or to join with another Fellowship church for mutual support.
- 6.3. Our Centres of Fellowship churches will be characterized as follows:
  - 6.3.1. Centres of Fellowship are those in which there is deep and deepening fellowship between members but where the opportunities for growth are limited by the capacity of members or their location. By concentrating on things, they are good at, rather than trying to do everything, Centres of Fellowship churches will be attractive Christian communities to those who live in their locality. They will focus on worship, learning and caring. They will seek ways of letting life grow in individual members and nurturing life in the church. They will still engage in service and evangelism but their main way of bringing life to the world will be through planned giving and the witness of individuals.
  - 6.3.2. The primary purpose of the activities these churches undertake in the community will be to build up the life of local communities. While it is hoped that they will also attract people to explore the Christian way of life, they will provide opportunities for isolated people to meet in a supportive and safe environment.
- 6.4. Our Centres of Mission churches will be characterised as follows:
  - 6.4.1. These are churches that are growing in depth or size, those with significant community or ecumenical engagement, or the potential for continuing growth. They will be actively engaged in all four areas of 'Our Calling'. They will be consistently seeking ways of letting life grow in individual members, of nurturing life in the church, and will be bringing life to the world as individuals and as a community.
  - 6.4.2. What that looks like will be different for each, so they will provide evidence that, over the past 18 months, they have been engaged in activities that meet at least three of the following objectives:
    - 6.4.2.1. Making new disciples and growing in discipleship.
    - 6.4.2.2. Establishing fresh expressions of church and church planting.
    - 6.4.2.3. Developing initiatives in mission-shaped ministry.
    - 6.4.2.4. Engaging in community-focused social action.
    - 6.4.2.5. Working with families, young people and children, and older people.
    - 6.4.2.6. Reaching the missing generations.
    - 6.4.2.7. Building community cohesion.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://360carbon.org/en-gb/>

- 6.5. It is assumed that Centres of Mission have sufficient resources to manage their own property, finance, Safeguarding and governance effectively.
- 6.6. Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP's)
  - 6.6.1. In addition to these two categories, there are also two LEP's in the Circuit which currently have ministers from other denominations. When ministry changes in such churches a decision will be required on whether they are Centres of Fellowship or Mission.
- 7. New Places for New People.**
  - 7.1. We will use circuit resources of staff time, energy and finances to explore New Places for New People (projects focused on forming new Christian communities for those not yet part of an existing church). This is in line with the Circuits priority for growth and the Connexional priorities (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/new-places-for-new-people/>) which encourage every circuit to imagine, begin and sustain something new (and we note that Connexional Grants are now only available for this category of mission).
  - 7.2. The focus will be on 'church' as a community gathered in the name of Christ, not necessarily on our present church buildings.
  - 7.3. We will share, where possible, with other denominations to establish new Christian communities in areas of new builds. We recognize this might require circuit boundaries to be more fluid (as some new-build schemes cross our historic boundaries).
  - 7.4. In the short to medium term, we believe there are opportunities to serve new Christian communities from our existing churches by investing in new forms of ministry (both lay and ordained) and supported by investing in updating our church buildings (to make them more accessible, friendly, flexible, and appealing). Such opportunities are our priority.
- 8. Summary**
  - 8.1. Since the Circuit Strategy was first approved in 2019 much has changed, and we have learnt new things and made substantial progress in some areas of our mission and ministry. We remain committed to the delivery of the strategy and believe that we have got a talented team of people (presbyters, lay staff, stewards, & members as volunteers) across the circuit to fulfil that strategy and so meet the challenges ahead with confidence.
  - 8.2. By focusing on the strategy, we aim to deliver vibrant and growing churches.
  - 8.3. As part of this we need to focus on our income and costs (our 'organic' finances) and at the same time repurpose our buildings, reusing capital as appropriate (and with agreement from TMCP) from any sold properties to help support the changes that arise from our strategy.
  - 8.4. We hope that our actions (and our focus going forward) results in growth in spirituality, in mission, in membership and attendance, and a corresponding growth in both volunteers and finances for our work for the Kingdom of God.