Enabling the Bury Methodist Circuit to Focus on Being a ‘Discipleship Movement Shaped For Mission’

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Enabling the Bury Methodist Circuit to Focus on Being a ‘Discipleship Movement Shaped For Mission’

John Illsley
Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

ENABLING THE BURY METHODIST CIRCUIT TO FOCUS ON BEING A ‘DISCIPLESHIP MOVEMENT SHAPED FOR MISSION’

Written by

JOHN ILLSLEY

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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Date Received: December 17, 2018
ABSTRACT

Enabling the Bury Methodist Circuit to Focus on Being a ‘Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission’

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Doctor of Ministry
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2018

The goal of this doctoral project is to lead the Bury Methodist Circuit in the United Kingdom into a restructuring of leadership and oversight to enable the circuit and its fifteen churches to better serve the contemporary age in discipleship and mission. This is in line with the tag line of the British Methodist Church—“a discipleship movement shaped for mission.”

The author serves as superintendent minister of the Bury Circuit and is due to retire in August 2019. Serving previously in two other circuits in the United Kingdom and nine years in Hong Kong reveal how the Bury Circuit needs to be reoriented for mission to its local community and to embrace a priesthood of all believers by encouraging and enabling lay ministry. The Methodist Church is in decline and there is a shortage of ministers. In the likely event that ministers leaving the circuit will not be replaced, the traditional solution of spreading ministerial resources over an increasing number of churches has been shown to be a recipe for accelerated decline. This project will facilitate a better alternative that will focus on mission and not maintenance.

The project is divided into three parts. Part One will include an introduction and will share the context of the British Methodist Church and the Bury Circuit, including the development and importance of lay ministries within the Methodist Church. Part Two will present a theology of biblical leadership and spiritual gifts, pointing to the priesthood of all believers, drawing on the works of Paul Bradshaw, Martyn Atkins, Malcolm Grundy, and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. Part Three will present the alternative thinking arising, the process to restructuring, and the outcomes expected and will establish the target audience, the leadership and training, and the process of implementation and evaluation.

Content Reader: Terry Walling, DMin

Words: 293
To my wife, Jean, who has travelled with me for so many years in pursuit of the call of Jesus Christ
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MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Background to This Project

The challenge is to reverse the decline in active membership in the Bury Methodist Circuit, to focus mission and discipleship on the local churches, and to encourage lay leadership in the churches. This paper includes a review of the history of Methodism in the United Kingdom to understand the background to the current situation and notes the origins of Methodism in the U.K. from the time of John Wesley. This was a mission to bring scriptural holiness to the people. The paper examines the role of lay people within the British Methodist Church; and focuses on the challenges facing the circuit. The project is a proposal for and leadership in establishing a new way of being church where the leadership is less clergy-led, but will encourage lay leadership, utilise the talents of the wider church better, and so will focus on mission and facilitate spiritual growth among its people. Although much of this project relates to structures, the implementation of a new vision-enabled re-structuring encapsulating the Holy Spirit inspired lay-led movement that was early Methodism, there will be spiritual growth and Kingdom passion. It is also hoped this project will impact the wider British Methodist Church.

Methodism in the United Kingdom

The Methodist Church in the U.K. continues, in the main, to be structured in the way inherited from John Wesley, its founder (1703–1791). Wesley had a natural ability at organisation and he favoured order. At Oxford University, John and his brother Charles
joined a Christian Holy Club and such was their diligent organisational ability that some of their critics referred to them as Methodists, a title that did not seem a problem to the Wesleys. As one of the architects of the Evangelical Revival in England—the other being George Whitefield—Wesley’s organisational abilities are noted by a biographer: “Wesley went about his new work methodically. He organized the groups into societies, then classes, connections, and circuits, under the direction of a superintendent.”¹ “Right from the start, Methodism was a religion that carried the genes of dialectical tension; it could scarcely have been otherwise, given the background of its founder. The most pervasive was the tension between enlightenment and enthusiasm, between rational calculation and the direct inspiration of the Spirit. Wesley was both an Oxford-trained logician with roots in the old high church tradition of Anglican spirituality and an incorrigible enthusiast for signs of direct divine intervention in the lives of his followers.”²

The societies Wesley formed became the individual Methodist churches of which there are 4,552 currently. These are organised presently into some 300 circuits each under the authority of a superintendent minister. These circuits are then organised into thirty-three districts under the leadership of a District Chair, and these then connect to the Methodist Church; the Methodist Church refers to itself internally as the Connexion. Methodism is committed to Connexionalism in that no church is independent but is

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² David Hempton, Methodism: Empire of the Spirit (New Haven: Yale University, 2005), accessed April 20, 2018, https://web-b-ebscohost-com.fuller.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHhuYV9fMTg3NjUwX19BTg2?sid=80a2330b-70dc-43ac-82fd-0a22efda7884@sessionmgr104&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1.
supported by the rest of the Methodist Church. Currently there are some 188,000 members of the Methodist Church; the membership is in steady decline and has been since Methodist Union in the U.K. in 1932.

The Methodist Church recognises two orders of ordained ministry—presbyters and deacons. The distinction is that presbyters are ordained to a ministry of Word and Sacrament, in particular holy communion, while deacons are part of a religious order, do not preside at communion, are not necessarily preachers, but serve the local community through the church. This reflects the appointment of the first deacons in Acts 6. For the purpose of this paper, presbyters and deacons will be referred to as ministers, a title used by the Methodist Church. Each Methodist Church is required to have a presbyter in pastoral charge, to chair the church council and preside at sacraments of baptism and communion.

All ministers are appointed by the Methodist Conference to the circuit. They are then allocated to the individual churches in the circuit to serve in pastoral charge by the superintendent minister. The superintendent is also a minister and will serve at least one church as its pastor. All ministers are paid by the circuit, not by individual churches, and all are paid the same amount, irrespective of experience, qualifications, or size of church served. The superintendent then does receive a small enhancement to salary for the extra responsibilities. In order to pay the ministers, a financial assessment is made on each of the circuit churches in proportion to their ability to pay. The first call on a church’s finances is to pay the monthly assessment. If a church cannot pay the assessment, it must close. The money for assessments is collected by the circuit and used to pay the ministers,
their expenses, and to provide housing for each minister. The circuit also pays an assessment to the district and the Methodist Connexion to cover their costs.

As there are over 4,000 churches but only some 1,600 ministers, most ministers will serve more than one church as its pastor. These ministers are supported in the work of preaching and leading worship by a team of circuit lay preachers, known in Methodism as local preachers. These are men and women, whose call from God to this ministry is tested. They are trained theologically and mentored in their early preaching. In due course they are then commissioned as local preachers, accordingly authorised to preach and lead worship in any Methodist church. They are allocated preaching appointments within the circuit by the superintendent minister. There is also an acknowledged move to appoint accredited worship leaders, although this is resisted by many local preachers who resent having to share the leading of the service with someone else. When a worship leader is appointed by a church council for a service, the local preacher can find their role reduced to just preaching the sermon.

Oversight in the British Methodist Church

In order to understand authority and oversight in the British Methodist Church, a review of the Methodist Conference Report, 2002, entitled “Episkope and Episcopacy”3 is necessary. This report noted “It is important to distinguish from the outset between ‘episkepbe’ (the Greek word for ‘oversight’) and ‘episcopacy’, which refers to the

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oversight exercised by bishops.”

The British Methodist Church does not have bishops but episkope is exercised at a communal level by the annual Conference which “then exercises episkope by directing and leading the Church’s thoughts and actions. It makes authoritative statements on matters of faith and order . . . it is the Conference which can and does establish the constitution of Methodism at every level.”

Methodism has districts with an appointed presbyter as chair (previously called chairman). The Report, though, notes that “Constitutionally, the Chairman has little authority.”

It is with circuits and the superintendent that authority rests. To quote the Report at length:

> It is often said that, in many ways, the most striking example of personal episkope in British Methodism is to be found in the Circuits, in the person of the Superintendent. The Superintendent is, among the ministers of the Circuit, first among equals. He or she is responsible for the making of the preaching plan for all the churches in the Circuit. He or she has the right, seldom exercised, to preside at all official meetings. He or she is responsible for ensuring that the Church’s discipline is upheld within the Circuit, and its doctrines not violated. In addition to these constitutional responsibilities, there are traditional expectations of the Superintendent’s ministry: he or she is expected to exercise a preaching, pastoral, representative ministry across the Circuit, bringing leadership and coordination to its life.

> The role of the Chairman as a minister of episkope is severely qualified by Standing Orders, in favour of the Superintendent. Although ‘it is the duty of the Chairman to exercise oversight of the character and fidelity of the ministers and ministerial probationers in the District’, it is the responsibility of the Chairman to strengthen the hand of the Superintendent and uphold his or her authority and rights under the Methodist constitution. . . . The Chairman of the District shall not so far set aside the office and responsibility of the Superintendent as to intervene in the administration of a Circuit or to preside at any meeting for the

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4 Ibid., 3.
5 Ibid., 4,5.
6 Ibid., 11.
administration of discipline or for any other circuit purposes in any Circuit except when, in special circumstances, the Synod otherwise directs, or by the invitation or with the consent of the Superintendent.\footnote{Ibid., 11–12.}

All this means that any changes to the structure of the circuit, for example, the responsibilities of the circuit ministers, deployment of lay workers, the quarterly plan for leading worship in each church, are taken by the circuit superintendent in consultation with his or her colleagues, the circuit stewards, and circuit meeting. This is further clarified in the \textit{Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church}. Standing Order 520(1) notes that presbyters are “appointed by the Conference to preach and exercise pastoral charge in those circuits on behalf of the Conference” while Standing Order 520(2) states that “it is the duty of the Superintendent appointed to each Circuit to enable the relevant courts, officers and ministers to fulfil their specific responsibilities and to ensure that they do so.”\footnote{Methodist Conference, \textit{The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church} (London: Methodist Publishing, 2017).} There is no requirement for the superintendent to consult denominational hierarchy. This differs from the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church (a global Church based in the United States of America) is an example of a Methodist Church in which episkope is exercised by bishops. Although John Wesley disapproved of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury being called ‘bishops’; he ‘appointed’ them (or ‘ordained’ them, as he sometimes wrote) to superintend the work in America. Within Wesley’s own lifetime, the term ‘bishop’ was in use in American Methodism.\footnote{Ibid., 13.}
Within the United Methodist Church, authority of superintending the church lies with the bishops; district superintendents have largely a pastoral role. British Methodism gives its superintendents the task of oversight and superintending of the churches in the circuit.

**Specific Needs in Methodism**

Methodism was born in the Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth century. “When at the Methodist Conference it was asked, ‘What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodist,’ the answer was, “‘reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.’”¹⁰ This “gave Wesley’s Methodists a distinctive identity. It also gave them a distinctive mission.”¹¹ Methodism saw itself as missional. In more recent times, in his report to the Methodist Conference in 2011, the then General Secretary of the Methodist Church, Martyn Atkins wrote,

> Methodism started as a movement; a movement that, in obedience to God, wanted to make a difference in the world within communities and the lives of individuals. We still share that same purpose today. So, it is important for us to regain something of that sense of movement as we seek, through words and deeds, to share the love of God. We want to be a church that helps people become ‘Disciples of Christ’; disciples who share God’s longing for a world healed and made whole.”¹²

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Yet the figures show a severe decline. In 2014, an article in The Times, the journalist Moira Sleight noted, “During the past ten years membership of the Methodist church has fallen by a third, with attendance falling by a similar proportion. Children’s attendance has reduced by about 58 per cent and the age profile of the majority of members is old.”13 At Methodist Union in 1932 the membership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain was 769,101; it is currently 188,000. The Methodist Church has done a risk assessment and determined that the biggest risk facing the Methodist Church is the failure to make enough followers of Jesus Christ committed to their local Methodist church. Without a core of committed members, all the other good community work done will be unsustainable.

Along with the decline in membership has come a decline in the number of people offering to the church to be ordained as ministers. There is now a severe shortage of ministers. In 2017, there were 150 circuits seeking ministers but less than 100 ministers available for appointment. This meant that one in three appointments could not be filled.

The other challenge is financial. The decline in membership has resulted in a corresponding decline in giving in the church. This is exasperated by a failure to reduce the number of buildings in line with the membership decline. To illustrate this, the Manchester and Stockport District of the Methodist Church, in the period of fifteen years to 2015, saw a 37 percent decline in membership but a decline of only 15 percent in the number of church buildings. So, British Methodism is facing smaller congregations, that

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are increasingly elderly, having the cost of aging buildings to support as well as paying assessment to support the ministers. There continue to be many committed Methodists who work very hard to support their local church but their attention is frequently on maintenance rather than mission. Most of the money given is used to maintain church buildings and support the ministers and the Methodist bureaucracy. Some of the Bury Circuit leaders have questioned, for example, as to why the Methodist Church still has thirty-three districts, the same number it had when membership was at least three times higher.

**Bury Methodist Circuit**

The author of this paper serves as superintendent of Bury Methodist Circuit. Bury is a Metropolitan Borough of some 190,000 people to the north of Manchester in North West England. Bury Circuit was formed in 2011 with the amalgamation of two previous circuits. Bury Circuit now covers the Metropolitan Borough of Bury plus two churches outside that local government area. Initially it had sixteen churches; one was closed in 2016 with a tiny congregation that did not have the financial resources to continue. The circuit has a staff of six Methodist presbyters, one Methodist deacon, and one Baptist minister who serves one of the circuit churches which is a Baptist/Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership. The superintendent is one of the six Methodist presbyters. All the ministers serve more than one church; the superintendent currently serves four churches in four separate communities. The circuit is facing a number of challenges, as detailed below.
There are probably too many buildings. On an average Sunday morning there are some 1,000 people in worship across the fifteen churches. The biggest has some 150 worshippers, the smallest about seven. These church buildings are in separate communities and so amalgamation is difficult. The circuit meeting has acknowledged that if they had the opportunity to start again, the circuit would not have fifteen separate congregations. Any decision to close a church can only come from the church council of that local church. It cannot be imposed from beyond that church council; the church council members serve as managing trustees for that church, managing its buildings, money, staff, and activities.

An increasing proportion of the congregations are elderly. A church census in 2005 across all the U.K. denominations showed that the average age of churchgoers was forty-five years old. There is a marked difference though between denominations. The average age in Pentecostal churches was thirty-three years old while the average in Methodist churches was fifty-five years old.\textsuperscript{14} This age profile results in increased pastoral work as the congregation ages, a lack of willing and able volunteers, and seemingly in many churches a reluctance to embrace new ideas.

Many of the fifteen churches are struggling financially. Costs continue to rise in the U.K., especially with the depreciation of the currency following the vote to leave the European Union. Ministers’ pay is linked to Consumer Price Inflation and so rises. Yet giving is not keeping up with cost increases due to the decline and aging of the congregations. The next staff change is expected to be in August 2019 when the deacon

and the superintendent are due to leave the circuit. The circuit knows that it needs to reduce costs and so must plan not to replace either of these two ministers.

Alongside the shortage of Methodist ministers, there is a reluctance of many ministers to come to the north in England. With currently one ministerial appointment in three not being filled—a situation that is projected to deteriorate—the circuit must make plans on the assumption that replacements will not be available even if that was financially viable.

The British Methodist Church must become missional and not merely maintaining what it has also done. Britain is not the Christian country that it used to be. Although there are remnants of Christendom in British society, these are dying. Britain is now a multi-cultural, multi-faith community and the church needs to come to terms with this new reality. Less than 5 percent of the adult population currently attend church on a regular basis. Stuart Murray sums up attitudes to mission inherited from the Reformation: “It was not that Reformers lacked a sense of mission, but they understood mission in the Christendom sense of imposing beliefs, legislating morality, controlling culture, monitoring behaviour, enforcing church attendance, encouraging loyalty to the state and pursuing dissenters. Mission was top-down and essentially coercive.”\textsuperscript{15}

In an effort to be relevant to the local community, as well as pay the bills, church buildings have become much more available to local activities and groups. Many of the churches in Bury Circuit are well used by the community. However, getting someone to attend, for example, Slimmer’s World meeting in the local Methodist church building has

\textsuperscript{15} Stuart Murray, \textit{Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World}. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 159.
little effect on introducing those attending to the saving hope in Christ. Such community groups see the church as just a community facility and have little interest in exploring anything religious. Bryan Stone sums up post-Constantine Christendom thinking: “The Constantinian story is ultimately the story of the church’s having arrived at a *chaplaincy* role within the empire. The church is welcomed or tolerated to the extent that it can improve social and economic stability. . . . The *telos* of the church now becomes its ‘usefulness’ to the empire (or nation) and its ‘way of life.’”16

There is a need to empower the local churches in their mission, ministry, and worship. The usefulness of the circuit’s major resource, its ministers, is diluted as their time is divided between several diverse and separate communities and churches. The superintendent serves four churches as minister in four distinct communities that do not relate to each other. He lives in one but travels to the others for appointments, services, and pastoral needs. The system of local preachers has now moved far away from what Wesley established. Under Wesley, the lay preachers were *local preachers*—serving their own local church. Now they are *circuit* preachers serving the circuit. Bury is not a big circuit; some in the U.K. are much bigger. Sheffield, for example, a city of over 500,000 people has one Methodist Circuit with over sixty churches and the local preachers are expected to serve those sixty churches. Even in Bury, on average, each local preacher visits each church once a year. There can be little pastoral link and little continuity in worship under this system. Increasingly, the Methodist Church must focus on Mission and particularly Incarnational Mission, the Mission of being with. Samuel Wells writes “I

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believe *with* is the most important word in the Christian faith.”

In this, the church cooperates with the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit makes the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of forever present today in regular and surprising ways. . . The surprising ways are the territory of mission: the wisdom or kindness of a stranger, the depths of community that merges in the face of tragedy, the mistakes that turn into God’s opportunities.”

The above points then lead to the reason for this project. The circuit is facing financial deficits in many of its churches. Some 95 percent of circuit costs are directly linked to the number of ministers it employs. For financial reasons as well as availability of ministers to come to Bury, the circuit recognises that when a change comes in August 2019 and two ministers leave the circuit, it must plan not to replace them. Normally this would result in the remaining ministers being required to accept pastoral responsivity for at least one additional church, so spreading ministerial resources ever more thinly and so diluting effectiveness. This is likely to lead to further concentration on maintenance with a reduction of mission effort. Pastoral care needs to be provided for everyone in the fifteen churches. Within the fifteen churches there will be some who see their future as a church as primarily as a centre for fellowship, offering care, support, love, and encouragement for what is likely to be a steadily declining number of people, while other churches see their focus as missional, engaging with and serving the wider community under Christ and making new followers of Jesus Christ. Both these models though need to be church, seen by Bryan Stone as,

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18 Ibid., 18.
The church is not another social organisation within civil society (and little more than a religious version of the Rotary Club). We are to be what is described in theology as an eschatological sign, a living demonstration that the end of time has come. The church is to witness to the resurrection of Jesus. This means that believers are now to live together before the world as if the end has come. Salvation is not about what happens when we die—everyone seems to believe in life after death—but we are children of God who have already passed from life to death\footnote{Stone, \textit{Evangelism after Christendom}, 104.}

This project is about empowering the local church to serve the Lord in this present age. The circuit offers several resources. It employs staff, has some money, allocates preachers, and oversees Sunday worship. The challenge is to share in what God is doing through his church by using these God-given resources more effectively to be the Discipleship Movement Focused on Mission that Martyn Atkins envisioned as Methodist Church General Secretary in his 2011 address to Conference.
CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

Introduction

This chapter seeks to establish the context of this project. As the project concerns the Bury Methodist Circuit, which geographically covers the town of Bury in England, this chapter will first consider the town of Bury, its history, and current economic status. The chapter then looks briefly at the history of Methodism in the U.K. and then specifically to a history of the development of Methodism in Bury, leading to the current circumstances of the Methodist churches in Bury. As this project concerns the need to renew lay ministry in the circuit, there is a section on the development of lay, alongside ordained, ministry in Methodism as a background to the project. The final section in this chapter is a reminder of the focus on growth in the circuit. There is a reference to what already has been done in the circuit, and, as the problem facing the Bury Circuit is not unique in Methodism, a review will be included noting work done in some other circuits in the U.K., and also work being done in Tennessee, U.S.A..
Bury, Greater Manchester

In 1887, John Bartholomew’s *Gazetteer of the British Isles* described the town of Bury in the following way:

*Bury.* – parliamentary and municipal borough, and township, SE. Lancashire, 11 miles NW. of Manchester and 195 NW. of London by rail—population. 90,494. B. is situated on an eminence between the Irwell and the Roche, and is a clean, well-built town. The staple industry is the cotton manufacturing; but there are also extensive works for bleaching, calico-printing, dyeing, engine-making, and the making of machinery; there is still some woollen manufacturing; and in the district are coal pits and stone quarries. Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850) was born at the adjoining seat of Chamber Hall. B. is connected by canal with Manchester and Bolton. The borough returns 1 member to Parliament.1

This is the background to the town of Bury. Ministry needs to be in context and the situation of Bury is of a town with a significant past but being forced to change as economic reality of decline in cotton manufacturing has hit the area. There has been a steady growth in population, interrupted by large loss of life in World War 1. There has been a significant aging of the population. In 1860, 35 percent of the population was under fifteen and only 3 percent aged sixty-five or over. By the year 2000, 18 percent were under fifteen while more than 15 percent were over sixty-five years old.

Bury was a mill town, majoring on the cotton industry, as did most of the north west of England. The major city in North West England is Manchester and such was the extent of the cotton trade that the city was known as ‘cottonopolis.’ Old mill buildings are to be seen throughout the North West. All the cotton trade died; it was only in 2018 that

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cotton spinning restarted in one small mill in Manchester. Bury was affected by this
decline. In 1861, over 27,000 people were employed in manufacturing, rising to 41,900
by 1911. By 2011, just over 6,000 were in manufacturing. Mining suffered a similar
decline. In 1911, 3,421 were employed in mining; by 2011 there were just forty-three.
Bury has had to reinvent itself and now the major employment is in consumer services
including retail, business services including banking, and public service which includes
education and health. In 1911, 15,400 worked in these three areas; by 2011 the total was
57,157. Bury, as Britain as a whole, has seen a remarkable change in education. The 1951
figures show that 86 percent of the workforce lacked any educational qualifications, a
figure that by 2010 was reduced to 22 percent.\(^2\)

**Metropolitan Borough**

Bury is a Metropolitan Borough, created in local government reorganisation in
1974. “Bury Metropolitan Borough consists of six towns, Bury, Ramsbottom, Tottington,
Radcliffe, Whitefield and Prestwich. Formed in April 1974 as a result of local
government re-organisation Bury was one of the ten original districts that formed the
County of Greater Manchester. The Borough has an area of 9,919 hectares (24,511 acres)
and serves a population of 181,300.”\(^3\) All were previously in Lancashire and many of the
local government functions were provided by Lancashire County Council. As a
Metropolitan Borough, Bury is a Unitary Authority. This means that Bury has full

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\(^2\) “A Vision of Britain Through Time,” University of Portsmouth, 2009–2017, accessed January 4,

\(^3\) “Bury – A Brief History,” Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, from Office of National
responsibility for all aspects of local government, including, education, highways, and planning. Although quite a small area, there are widespread differences in deprivation across the six towns. Ramsbottom is among the most affluent areas in England while Radcliffe is among the most deprived as measured by the Government and reported by the Manchester Evening News.⁴

**Investment of Government**

The North of England often feels neglected by Government. In England, there is an economic pull towards the south east and London. The Brexit vote—a referendum about whether to leave the European Union—demonstrated this divide. London voted to stay while the rest of England voted to leave. An article in the Guardian Newspaper illustrates this imbalance, in the area of infrastructure investment of Government:

The size of the investment gap between London and the rest of England was made stark by new analysis showing Crossrail alone is earmarked to receive nine times more funding than all the rail projects from the North’s three regions combined.

Figures derived from a research report by IPPR, show Londoners receive £5,203 more per head on capital investment than people in the north-east—a discrepancy sure to reignite a long-running row on whether London’s growth is coming at the detriment of the rest of the U.K. Our additional analysis of the 2013 Government Infrastructure Plan, the IPPR’s data source, showed that the £14.5bn total capital expenditure planned for [London’s] Crossrail outmatches the £1.6bn earmarked for rail projects in Yorkshire and the Humber, the north-east and the north-west by nine to one.

Other projects in the capital including tube improvements mean that £5,426 will have been spent on each resident of London compared to £223 on those in the north-east region. That’s over 24 times as much.

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On the surface of it, residents of the north west seem the most fortunate region outside London, with project spending at £1,248 per head. However, Guardian analysis found that more than half of that total was down to the decommissioning of the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria—necessary, doubtless, but hardly an infrastructure ‘improvement’ as most people would understand it.\(^5\)

**Early Methodist History**

John Wesley was born in 1703, the fifteenth child of Reverend Samuel Wesley, Anglican Rector of Epworth in Lincolnshire, and his wife, Susanna. John was educated first at Charterhouse School in London before moving to Oxford University. He was ordained in the Church of England, first as a deacon in 1725 and then as a priest in 1728. He and his brother Charles met up with a group at university known as the Holy Club. The name Methodist was initially term of derision applied to John and friends as a result of their formal disciplined spiritual ways. John spent some time in America involved in unsuccessful missionary work and returned to England seeking spiritual enlightenment. In 1738 he went unwillingly, as his diary notes, to a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London where “one was reading Luther’s preface to the *epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even mine,

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Wesley then began to preach that the salvation he had discovered through the Holy Spirit was available for all. In 1739, George Whitefield, another member of the Oxford Holy Club, invited John to join him in open air preaching. In spring 1739 Wesley arrived in Bristol, where the first Methodist building later would be built, filled with doubts about his ability to preach to uneducated men and in the open air. Wesley never enjoyed the experience. He notes,

I could scarce reconcile myself to this strange way of preaching in the field, of which [Whitefield] set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls a sin, if it had not been done in a church. . . . At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people.  

**Methodism After Wesley**

John Wesley never intended to form a separate church/denomination but to bring about renewal in the Church of England. His leadership resisted any break from the Church of England and sought to stay within the Anglican communion. Despite John Wesley’s claim ‘I live and die a member of the Church of England,’ by the time of his death (1791) the Methodist movement (which, by then, was largely associated with John Wesley) had grown apart from the national church. Methodists in America had already parted from the British ‘connexion’ and from the 1790s onwards, Methodism in Britain

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[itself] divided over policies, personalities and priorities. Each strand of Methodism had its own charismatic leaders and particular styles of worship and organisation.”

The first group to break from the Wesleyans were the New Connexion. Next, came the Primitive Methodists, from 1812. They got the nickname the Ranters or were known as the Prims. As the name might suggest, they urged Methodism away from its increasingly formal worship and its grand buildings as Wesleyans and return to its origins which included outdoor evangelism and strict discipleship. The Prims were stronger in the working-class communities of the midlands and north of England. Wesley and Methodism had seen success in preaching in the tin mining districts of Cornwall; that area the Bible Christians separated from the Wesleyans after 1815. In the twentieth century most of the Methodist denominations united together, although there are still some Independent Methodist Churches and an independent Wesleyan Reformed Union. The New Connexion, Bible Christians, and United Methodist Free Churches came together in 1907, forming the United Methodist Church. The final uniting was in 1932 when the United Methodist Church joined with the Wesleyans and Prims to form the Methodist Church.9


9 Ibid.
Table 1: The Methodist Family Tree

Bury Methodism

There are records of Methodist meetings in Birtle, Bury as early as 1749 and John Wesley visited a Preaching House at Pits o’th Moor in 1774. The Union Street/North Street Chapel was built c1815–1817, with burial ground attached. The Primitive Methodist branch of Methodism was founded nationally in 1812: the first Primitive chapel in Bury was in William Street (1828), although a Primitive Methodists preaching
room in Clarke Street opened on the June 20, 1824. Brunswick Free United Methodist, North Street, Bury, also known as Wesleyan Association Chapel, was erected in 1836. Bolton Street Methodist New Connection, Bury was first erected in Bury Lane in 1813, then in 1875 the congregation moved to a new building in Heywood Street. This closed in 1968 when the congregation joined with others in the centre of Bury to become Bury Central Methodist Church in Union Street. The Nineteenth Century saw many churches being built, often in competition with each other.

The first Methodist circuit in Bury was created in 1804 from parts of Bolton and Blackburn Circuits. At that point there were thirteen churches at Bury: Radcliffe, Radcliffe Bridge, Ashworth, Unsworth, Haslingden, Edenfield, Flaxmoss, Ramsbottom, Grane, Warren Lane, Whalley, and Accrington. This circuit was subsequently divided but another eight churches were added, creating a Bury Circuit of seventeen churches. The Primitive Methodists also had a Bury Circuit of seven churches by 1850 to which were added another three churches. Methodist Union in 1932 brought all churches under one denomination and created four circuits, Bury, Heywood, Radcliffe, and Prestwich. Over the years, mergers took place in circuits, the final one being in 2011 when all the Bury Methodist churches came under the one Bury Circuit; that merger coincided with the start of the superintendency of the author of this paper. At that point there were sixteen churches, reduced later to fifteen with the closure of one. These fifteen churches cover all the six towns that made up the Metropolitan Borough of Bury. These churches


vary in size. In total, records show a total of 984 people attending Bury Methodist churches on Sunday for worship in October 2016. The largest church, Bolton Road Methodist Church, saw an attendance of 144; the smallest, Edenfield Methodist Church, an attendance of 9.\textsuperscript{12} The circuit is served by 6.5 ministers. The half time minister serves one church; the superintendent serves four churches.

Every October, the Methodist Church counts its membership, attendance at worship, and total attendance at all church-based activities. For the Bury Circuit, the figures for 2014 show a membership of 1011 and total attendance in the week of 1860. In 2015 the corresponding figures were 983 and 1849. By 2016 the figures were 898 and 1760. 2017 saw another decline in membership, at a reduced rate, to 868.\textsuperscript{13} The root of the problem is that while in 2014 for example, the fifteen Methodists churches in Bury saw thirteen new Christians welcomed into membership, there were fifty-four deaths. This decline in membership has not been matched by a decline in the number of church buildings. With less than a thousand members of the fifteen Methodists churches in Bury, the circuit could be much more viable if the number of buildings and separate congregations were reduced. As already referenced, the decision to close a church, though, can only be taken by the local membership; the superintendent has no authority to force a closure.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Alongside a decline in membership has come a financial problem. The ministers are employed by the circuit, not the local churches. In order to raise money to pay the ministers and finance Methodist central funds, a charge, the Assessment, is made by the circuit on the churches. This Assessment is a proportion of each church’s total income. Five years ago, in 2012/13 the charge was 64 percent of income. By 2017 it had reached nearly 79 percent. This increase is due to increased costs along with declining membership. It is now becoming unsustainable for many of the churches. They are left with a reducing income to run the church building and to finance local mission activities.

**Development of Lay and Ordained Ministries**

Wesley’s heart-warming experience, as described above, was in 1738. The first Methodist Conference was in 1744 where ten people met to confer with John Wesley. Frank Baker notes that “four were laymen who had to wait until the other five clergy should agree that they would be called in.” Baker reports that,

at the 1744 Conference there were four lay preachers to six clergy. The proportion rose rapidly, becoming nine laymen to four clergy in 1748 and forty to three in 1753. Though the actual process is somewhat obscure, this rapid flow of lay preachers gradually divided into two main streams: the Travelling or Itinerant Preachers who gave all their time to this work and were supported by Wesley and the Methodist people, and the Local Preachers who supported themselves and preached mainly in their own locality. Of the forty-one lay preachers at the 1973 Conference for instance, twenty-five were described as travelling preachers and sixteen as local preachers. . . . The travelling preachers developed into the Ministers of Methodism while the local preachers retained their original name and status.15

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15 Ibid., 22.
The development in Methodism to use lay preachers was never Wesley’s original plan. In fact, he naturally opposed to any but the ordained priests being involved in worship, preaching, or the administration of the sacraments. Baker comments on how the use of lay preachers developed and how John Wesley’s mother had a significant influence on this.

Wesley initially did not want lay preachers—‘Church order laid it down that no one could preach until he had been episcopally ordained.’ It was Wesley’s mother who convinced John Wesley. John Wesley was shocked that a man called Thomas Maxfield, left in temporary charge of the very headquarters of Methodism, the Foundery in London, had exceeded his instructions by venturing to preach there. Susanna Wesley, John’s mother, responded to John Wesley’s shock ‘take care what you do with regard to that young man, for he is as surely called by God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him also yourself.’ Wesley had to admit, ‘It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth to Him good.’ Maxfield became a lay preacher under Wesley’s direction and others followed.16

Even as early as 1746, there was a concern that a separate order of Preachers was being established. A suggestion was made that this should be formalized and that some form of recognition and these lay preachers should receive approval almost corresponding to ordination.17 Only as late as 1790 a man called Joseph Sutcliffe was received into full Connexion by the Methodist church; Wesley saw this as a sort of half-way recognition, half way to full ministry and ordination.18

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16 Ibid., 21.
17 W L Doughty, John Wesley: His Conference and his Preachers (London: Epworth, 1944), 37.
18 Ibid., 38.
Methodist ministers today are first received into full connexion and then ordained at the annual Conference. Over the years, the system has undergone development. What previously were the travelling evangelists are now the Methodist ministers who serve a limited number of churches and do most of their preaching in those churches in which they have pastoral responsibility. The local preachers, who were previously focused on their local church, now travel the circuit. This scattering of local preachers to the circuit churches results in little continuity in preaching and worship. A survey of Methodist ministers published in 2006 highlighted how the current situation of ministers serving more than one church and local preachers planned around the circuit was failing. A majority (55 percent) agreed that “not being more often planned in each congregation (to lead worship) inhibited growth. . . . Three quarters of the ministers (seventy-six percent) agreed that this discontinuity hinders change in worship.”

Focus on Growth

The Methodist Church is in long term decline. Between 2009 and 2014 there was “a decline of 15.1% in weekly attendance . . . [and] almost 80% of Local churches (3,348 out of 4,254) did not receive any new members . . . [and] fewer than 5% (201 churches) received four or more new members in the course of the year.” Within Bury Circuit, some time was spent some six years ago looking at the Bury Circuit and the circuit

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leadership came to certain conclusions about structure, priorities, and vision. The aim then was to focus on what were called ‘mission centres’ among the circuit churches, while supporting the pastoral work in other churches. To implement this thinking a number of changes were made:

- Six volunteer lay pastors were appointed to serve six churches.
- A deacon was commissioned to work in certain areas.
- The Methodist Churches in Radcliffe were looking at their future; Close Methodist Church was closed and an application for a Free School had been submitted to the Government. If successful, the Methodists planned to use the new facility for worship, outreach and community service, closing the existing buildings in Radcliffe. There is now no indication that the Free School will be approved by Government.
- Edenfield Methodist Church have sold their building and are worshipping in the Edenfield Community Centre and shared a united Covenant Service at the Parish Church in Edenfield. They are planning other united services.
- The Methodist Churches in Heaton Park, Prestwich, and Whitefield have held a few united services for special occasions.
- The number of communion services offered in several churches has reduced.

While the above changes have been important, there has been no major shift in the use of resources; for many, church life has continued as before. Something more radical is required. There follows a review of what some other Methodist church leaders are doing.
Hull (Centre and West) Circuit

The Hull (Centre and West) Circuit in the U.K. started in 2013 a process of structured conversation with each church in the circuit. “The crucial question was this one: ‘Thinking realistically, over the next five years and beyond, is your future primarily as a centre of fellowship (offering love and care for a steadily declining number of people) or as a centre of mission (engaging with and meeting the needs of the wider community and making new disciples)?’”21 By 2015, the circuit restructured with five churches as centres of fellowship, together served by one minister, and eleven as centres of mission, served by five ministers.

Preston Ribble Circuit

This circuit has been going through a review and finally a number of recommendations were agreed. Fundamental to the conclusions was “A golden thread is that we believe that in order to see the ‘new thing’ that God wants to do among us, it will be necessary to identify some areas of work to lay down. This decision to declare a ‘mission accomplished’ should not be viewed as a failure but a chance to create space, time, resources for a new and exciting adventure with God.”22 This meant that it could not be business as usual and that some things had to cease to make space for the new. In addition, “The Circuit should create a new Plan for Worship and Discipleship which

21 David Parry “From a Cycle of Decline to Signs of Real Growth” The Connexion no. 9 (Autumn 2017), 12.

renews our commitment to relevant, high quality worship and responds to the opportunities for mission in our churches.”

United Methodist Church, Tennessee Conference

2016 Annual Conference decided to reduce from seven districts to five:

• Fewer districts will allow our District Superintendents, as missional strategists, to more easily collaborate in creating training and resources through categories of churches with similar context and size.
• The District Superintendents will partner with Rev. Melinda Britt, Director of Connectional Ministries, to identify trained leaders who will walk churches through processes to help them better understand their contexts and create measurable outcomes for ministry.
• By identifying the assets and needs of congregations, we hope to help them leverage the gifts of each congregation and envision new opportunities for ministry and missional engagement.

The same Redistricting document notes the reason:

The Conference is further committed to increasing the capacity of our congregations to offer Christ and make disciples of him for the transformation of the world.... Superintendents, their staffs and the staff members of Connectional Ministries are investing in congregations to ‘walk alongside’ them in visioning and missional engagement. The Church Vitality Team provides a number of resources: missional facilitators, healthy congregations workshops, youth ministry initiatives, discipling systems, leader development, connecting neighbors (disaster response readiness), and more.

This document from Tennessee is a fair summary of what this project is about.

23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter, in a review of some pertinent literature, will reflect initially on early Christian worship, its structure, and its leadership. It will look at the role of its leaders and the role of the laity. The review then transitions to the early days of the Methodist Church in the U.K. under Wesley, the growth in the number of Methodist societies round the country and his eventual use of lay preachers. It will look at the circuit structure that he established and how this has evolved into the present day. Some historical documents relating to the Methodist Church in north-west England will be reviewed. Consideration will be given to the thinking of the contemporary Methodist Church through its former General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Martyn Atkins. Grundy’s book about multi-congregational ministry and its possible application to this project will be reviewed. Finally, in this chapter, the challenge facing the church of ministry in a post-Christendom, post-modern world as seen by the authors of two books will be considered.

Early Christian Worship

This section reviews the development of Christian worship from its early days through the major change that came with the conversion of Constantine in 313 A.D.,
when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, persecution ceased, and the church became politically powerful. Two books will be considered. The first is Paul Bradshaw *Early Christian Worship*, where the author considers the two sacraments acknowledged by the Protestant Church, namely baptism and eucharist. The second book is James F. White *Documents of Christian Worship*, where this author does a wider survey of the development of Christian worship from its early format, through to the Reformation and more recent developments to frontier ministry and the evangelical revival under Wesley.

Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*

The Chinese character for crisis is made up of two characters, that of dangerous and another that is opportunity. The contemporary church in the U.K. in facing such a dangerous opportunity, a crisis, in that the church seeks to minister in a post-Christendom and post-Christian era. Britain is no longer a Christian country; it is multi-faith and many are of no faith. The contemporary church is now challenged to witness to the Gospel in an environment much closer to the early church than the church that has existed since Constantine. By considering early Christian worship, and in particular baptism and eucharist, it is possible to reflect on the changes that came when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire and where people became members through birth rather than conversion. ¹ The first part of Bradshaw’s book concerns baptism. Reference is made

to the Didache, written between 50 and 120 A.D., as a source of early Christian thinking and action concerning baptism. The Didache suggests that “the normal pattern of Christian initiation consisted of a period of instruction and fasting, by both candidate and at least some members of the Christian community, followed by immersion in running water accompanied by the recitation of the name of the Trinity.” A later document, the Didascascale, written about 230 A.D., points to an important place being given to pre-baptismal anointing with oil, while the third century Acts of Thomas refers to “an anointing on the head alone before the immersion.” What emerges, as Bradshaw notes, is that

what we find here is not a standardized baptismal theology shared by all Christians but a range of different ways of interpreting and expressing what was thought to happen when a person became a Christian. Hebrews 6:4 and 10:32, for instance, speaks of the baptized as having been ‘illuminated.’ . . . John 3, on the other hand, uses instead the metaphor of rebirth by water and Spirit; a similar concept also appears in Titus 3:5, which speaks of the ‘washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. . . . In the Acts of the Apostles, the emphasis falls instead on the forgiveness of sins and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. . . . By contract to these ways of speaking, in Paul’s baptismal theology, the primary image seems to have been union with Christ through participation in his death and resurrection. (see especially Romans 6:2ff.; Colossians 2:12).  

A change in baptismal practice came with the conversion of Constantine, Bradshaw comments,

The cessation of persecution in the early fourth century brought a major change in the practice of Christian initiation. Because it was now safe and respectable to become a Christian, there was a considerable increase in the number of people wanting to join the church. However, not all of these took the step because they

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2 Ibid., 9.
3 Ibid., 11.
4 Ibid., 6.
had experienced an inner conversation: . . . All of this had a profound effect on the nature of the baptismal process itself. Whereas in primitive Christianity it had functioned as a ritual expression of a genuine conversion experience that candidates were already undergoing in their lives, now in the fourth century the baptismal process became instead the means of conveying a profound experience to the candidates in the hope of bringing about their conversion. In order to accomplish this new role, the process became much more dramatic – some might say theatrical – in character.⁵

Infant baptism is also referenced. “The first undisputed reference to the custom occurs in north Africa at the beginning of the third century in the writings of Tertullian, who disapproves it.”⁶ However, by the fifth century, “the same beliefs that had at first caused people to delay baptism began to lead them in the opposite direction: if baptism was necessary for salvation, was it not desirable to baptize young children as young as possible, lest they should happen to die and forfeit their opportunity for salvation.”⁷

When the author of this paper started his ministry, infant baptism was the norm in British society. Parents who had no Christian connection explained that they wanted to “have their baby done as it gave them a good start in life,” to quote one mother seeking baptism of her baby. There are still relics of that Christendom thinking among some parents and especially grandparents, where such baptism has become almost relegated to folk-religion, but the number of such baptisms is significantly in decline.

The second part of Bradshaw’s book concerns eucharist. Bradshaw comments,

Scholars increasingly recognize, therefore, that for a proper understanding of the roots of Christian eucharistic practice, the Last Supper needs to be set within the broader context of shared meals that seem to have been characteristic of Jesus and

⁵ Ibid., 23.
⁷ Ibid., 33, 35.
his first followers. . . . [In addition], all the meals Jesus shared with his followers, and not merely the Last Supper, were seen by the early Christians as expressing not only human companionship but also the participants’ communion with one another and with God.8

Certainly, references to the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20–22 do suggest a proper meal. However, Bradshaw notes that

Many scholars have believed that Eucharist and meal became separated from one another at an early date [late first/early second century]. . . . Writing in Rome in the middle of the second century, Justin provides what may be the earliest description of a eucharistic celebration which no longer includes a full meal . . . the eucharistic action proper here is now preceded by a service of reading, preaching and intercessory prayer.9

The fourth century brought significant change to the church. No longer was it a persecuted minority but it had become the state religion of the Roman Empire. Many people joined the church and for many reasons, not all of which had a spiritual basis. Not everyone receiving the eucharist had had any sort of spiritual experience.

In order to impress upon worshippers the solemnity of what was happening in the eucharistic rite and of the reverent behaviour appropriate for such an occasion, therefore, the style of eucharistic celebrations underwent a significant alteration. They became much more formal and elaborate; they used such things as ceremonial actions, vesture, processions, and music in order to make an impression upon the congregation.10

8 Ibid., 41–43.
9 Ibid., 46–47.
10 Ibid., 71.
White covers a wider time scale and more of the practicalities of organising worship than Bradshaw.\textsuperscript{11} Sunday became more common as the normal day of Christian worship in the early second century.\textsuperscript{12} White refers to the Quartodeciman controversy which raged over whether Easter should always be observed on a Sunday or on the same day of the week as the Jewish Passover, the Asian dioceses losing the argument.\textsuperscript{13}

Sung congregational psalmody was only introduced to Christian worship in sixteenth century by John Calvin.\textsuperscript{14} Interestingly, one of the debates was about how much Scripture should be read at times of public worship. The answer seems to be a much greater use of Scripture than certainly this author is used to. “How large a portion [of Scripture] shall be read at once, is left to the wisdom of the Minister: but it is convenient, that ordinarily one Chapter of each Testament be read at every meeting; and sometimes more, where the chapters be short, or coherence of matter requireth it.”\textsuperscript{15}

One of the changes brought by Wesley was the use of extempore, rather than read liturgical prayers. Wesley comments, “And I have prepared a liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England (I think, the best constituted national church in the world) which I advise all the travelling-preachers to use, on the Lord’s day, in all congregations,

reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the supper of the Lord on every Lord’s day."

Modern Methodism in the U.K. is now a long way from weekly communion.

White also claims that the frontier camp in United States was where the emphasis emerged again on individual religious experience. Charles G. Finney (1792–1875) led the way in promoting a pragmatic approach to worship. He noted that worship forms have changed since the early church and so suggested that there is no fixed form for worship as defined by either history or scripture. Instead worship should be contemporary and in line with what was working at that time and for that congregation. Finney also calls for revival:

Look at the Methodists. Many of their ministers are unlearned, in the common sense of the term, many of them taken right from the shop or farm, and yet they have gathered congregations, and pushed their way, and won souls every where. Wherever the Methodists have gone, their plain, pointed and simple but warm and animated mode of preaching has always gathered congregations. . . . We must have exciting, powerful preaching, or the devil will have the people, except what the Methodists can save. . . .

**Early Methodist Worship**

This section focuses on the development of Methodist worship in the U.K. and in particular the development of lay preachers. Wesley was an ordained priest within the

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17 White, *Documents*, 112.

18 Ibid., 114.

Church of England and had no desire to form a separate denomination. Events and the Holy Spirit led him and the Methodist Church in a different direction.

Geoffrey Milburn & Margaret Batty eds., *Workday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching*

Within the contemporary British Methodist Church, some two out of every three services are taken by lay preachers, called local preachers. These are men and women, whose call by God to this ministry has been tested, who are trained, mentored, and supervised as they qualify as local preachers. By the later years in the nineteenth century, there were more than 40,000 local preachers.\(^{20}\) Local preachers now are vital to the Methodist Church, a continuation of Wesley’s own experience. “Local preachers were at the very heart of these movements and played a key role in establishing and extending them in the crucial early years, often being as active as were the travelling preachers, who were regarded, essentially, as different from the local preachers only in that they worked full time, received remuneration for their labours, and moved from circuit to circuit.”\(^{21}\) After Wesley’s death, Methodism divided and although the biggest group, the Wesleyan Methodists, held more firmly to their Anglican roots, other parts of wider Methodism did not. The authors note that “the greater freedom and scope of the non-Wesleyan local preachers is evidenced in other ways. They baptised children, conducted funerals; they

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 65.
might share in making the circuit preaching plan; . . . they were allowed to conduct love feasts; and they were allowed to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.”

The authors though do note Wesley’s initial dislike of lay preachers. “Wesley admitted that he and his brother had been prejudiced against allowing laymen to preach.” Yet one of the effects of the evangelical revival for lay people was an irresistible call and desire to preach. In the end, Wesley was forced by necessity into accepting this ministry. Wesley wrote, “I submit to every ordinance of man wherever I do not consider there is an absolute necessity for acting contrary to it. Consistently with this I do tolerate lay preaching, because I conceive there is an absolute necessity for it; inasmuch as, were it not, thousands of souls would be perishing.”

There were objections to local preachers, in that they were not ordained and were often uneducated. Wesley came to share this disquiet. By about 1767, Wesley was “beginning to feel some anxiety, even mistrust, towards them.” By then he began to sense that he was “losing control of the local preachers. He began to fear the effects of their preaching and to regret their lack of training and oversight.”

The authors note also the development of the current system of circuits. By 1740 the Methodist work was being organised. “The country was divided into ‘rounds’ [later called circuits]. Men who had shown themselves able preachers in their own locality were called, employed and paid by Wesley as full-time professional preachers [‘itinerants’] to

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22 Ibid., 66.
23 Ibid., 12.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 13.
26 Ibid., 29.
take spiritual charge of a round. They worked through it systematically over a period of four to six weeks, and every two years or less Wesley moved them on.”

No mention is made here of the local preachers. Again, the authors comment, “Judging by the Minutes of Conference, Wesley’s Journal, Letters and the Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, it is probably true to say that in the first quarter century of Methodism, little was specifically said about local preachers because in Wesley’s eyes they were simply preachers who were not travelling.”

W.L. Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conference and His Preachers*

Doughty’s book is based on a lecture given at Wesley’s Chapel, London on July 20, 1944, the 200th Anniversary of John Wesley’s first Conference at the Foundery, Moorfields, London June 25–30, 1744. The author refers to that first Conference:

Besides the two Wesley brothers, there were four clergymen of the Church of England and four of the lay preachers. Of the four lay preachers, only one, John Downes, remained faithful to the end. . . . The six clergymen, having spent time in prayer, approved a scheme of procedure under three heads: (a) What to teach; (b) how to teach; and (c) what to do, viz. how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice. . . . The lay brethren it was “agreed to invite from time to time such of them as we should think proper.”

Methodist Conferences, during Wesley’s lifetime were apparently to advise and not govern him. “[Conference’s] consultations afford little more than an opportunity for

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27 Ibid., 15.
28 Ibid., 28.
his [Wesley’s] opinions to be promulgated.” Doughty continues concerning the work and preaching of the local preachers:

Several of the first lay preachers were men of very extraordinary natural powers, as well as of deep and genuine religious feeling. Some had made acquisitions as biblical scholars; yet generally, the irreparable want of education among them, and their ignorance, often, of the Bible they were able to expound, threw them upon their own, and their only resources; that is to say, upon a single-minded and fervent consciousness of the reality, power, and excellence of the Gospel, thought of in its first principles. They were men, some of them, whose power over the people, as preachers, was little less than that of their educated masters. . .

The Preachers knew that they had been called by God to turn men and women from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and that cannot be achieved by the mere preaching of naturalistic theism, or metaphysical Trinitarianism or any subtle logomachies of Christology, important as these may be in their place. Sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness, assurance, issuing in sanctified lives characterized by holy tempers and good works—these were the doctrines that they sought to clarify in their own minds and with which they were asked to go out afresh to defeat the powers of evil that stalked through eighteenth-century Britain.

Doughty comments concerning the increasing dominance in Conference proceedings given to its preachers: “It will occasion no surprise that the Conference soon came to concern itself very largely with the Preachers: their choice, training, work, discipline, physical well-being, and even, on occasion, their domestic affairs.”

Contemporary Methodism in the U.K. has become aware of the disproportionate amount of time, money, and emphasis it gave to its ministers and too little on its lay people. An attempt was made more recently to change emphasis and priorities. This was in 2012.

31 Doughty, John Wesley, 24.
32 Ibid., 25–33.
33 Ibid., 29.
under the title *The Fruitful Fields* project—a project about the Methodist Church’s activities in the fields of formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship, research, and development.\(^{34}\) The effectiveness of this report in changing priorities is doubted.

**Renewal in Methodism**

This section looks to the future of Methodism. The first book reviewed in this section was written by a former General Secretary of the British Methodist Church while the second tackles the situation of multi-congregational ministry, where one minister will serve more than one separate and distinct congregation/church.

Martyn Atkins, *Resourcing Renewal: Shaping Churches for the Emerging Future*

Martyn Atkins, refers to what he describes as inherited church that is now in a post-modern, post-Christendom, and even post-Christian environment. He comments that “there is little good news at all for poor models of traditional inherited church. So, whenever the basics of being church—mission and evangelism, worship, pastoral care, leadership, fellowship, sacred space and so on—are poor, there would seem to be an even bleaker future for that model of church.”\(^{35}\) At the start of the book, Atkins states its aim: “This is a book about the renewal of the Church, which I believe occurs naturally as a

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consequence of the Church engaging obediently and faithfully in the mission of God.”

Renewal is though only from God and cannot be forced or manufactured. “Renewal comes about when the Church takes its place in the Mission of God in pursuit of the kingdom and opens its life so as to become one with the God of mission.” “The missionary nature of God, the pursuing of the *missio Dei* and the goal of the kingdom of God in a changing world naturally produce new ecclesiology and fresh expressions of church. The incarnational model of engagement that Jesus Christ exemplifies naturally involves emerging ecclesiology and new forms of church.”

So, Atkins is seeking to lead the church into Kingdom thinking, under and empowered by the missional God. Yet church is too frequently dominated by introspective thinking, more concerned with its buildings, its ministry, and what makes its people comfortable. This is reflected by another author, “The church gets into trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the Kingdom business. In the church business, people are concerned with church activities, religious behavior, and spiritual things.” Atkins then focuses on the customary model of church which emphasises the role and importance of the minister. He refers to Robert Warren who led his church in Sheffield into explosive growth. Warren had noted, “For a long time in the West a certain model and understanding of church has been so dominant as to monopolize the term ‘church’ and defines church as ‘church = building + priest +

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36 Ibid., 1.
37 Ibid., 21.
38 Ibid., 45.
stipend.\textsuperscript{40} The days of monolithic monopoly church models are passing away, however.\textsuperscript{41} Early Methodism grew with its lay preachers. In places like China and Cuba the church is growing but not clergy led. This is emphasized elsewhere: “[The reinstatement of the whole people of God] . . . will be realised only if the ‘nonclergy’ are willing to move up, if the ‘clergy’ are willing to move over, and if all of God’s people are willing to move out”\textsuperscript{42}

A final reflection from Martyn Atkins concerns worship, on which subject he has a number of comments that are relevant: “One ‘basic’ that is almost always a part of inherited church transitioning is a renewal of worship. . . . Possibly the most significant ‘conversion’ an inherited congregation undergoes in relation to worship is realizing that it is not ‘theirs.’ Not only is it not theirs but God’s, but it is not ‘theirs’ to manage as they want, if the way they want to manage it does not enable others to enter into worship, or jars with the desires of a missionary God.”\textsuperscript{43} He continues,

In almost all cases of transition, the renewal of worship—of whatever style and liturgical type it may have been—tends to mean that it becomes more informal and relaxed. . . . Without doubt the most common characteristic of renewed worship is the presence of real joy and hope and laughter. . . . Yet another feature of worship in transition is a greater level of participation and involvement by members, which is of course what the word ‘liturgy’ signifies—the work or offering of the people.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Robert Warren, \textit{Being Human, Being Church: Spirituality and Mission in the Local Church}, (Basingstoke, UK: Marshall Pickering, 1995), 34.

\textsuperscript{41} Atkins, \textit{Resourcing Renewal}, 62.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 84–85.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 86–87.
These observations about renewal and worship and change are fundamental to this project. The author of this paper, though, does regret the seeming inability of the Methodist Church’s General Secretary to convince enough others to change their ways—Methodism continues to decline as change and renewal, in the main, are resisted.

Malcolm Grundy, *Multi–Congregational Ministry: Theology and Practice in a Changing Church*

Multi–Congregational Ministry, where one minister serves more than one church, is common in British Methodism. Due to declining congregations plus non-availability of ministers, this is now becoming the norm in other denominations. “In 2011, 71 per cent of the Church of England’s parishes were in multi-congregational amalgamations of one kind or another.” Grundy enumerates the problems faced by the institutional church.

There is bureaucracy. “Any layperson who generously gives of their time or anyone involved in the work of their denomination as an official or senior minister will know that the current organizational ethos of their denomination consumes much of the time and resources available.”

Richard Roberts argues the “initial energy and ‘power’ which the Spirit gave to churches was subsumed by the creation of hierarchies which gradually took power to themselves in ways that stifle individualism and prevented initiative.”

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46 Ibid., 21.

There is the inherited system of authority and oversight. Grundy quotes Roland Allen:

The Church cannot grow because we insist on a full-time professionally trained ministry as the essential leadership of the Church and the only means of the administration of the sacraments. Because such a ministry cannot be provided in sufficient quantity, the Church cannot expand. . . . Moreover, such a ministry, even where available, is not acceptable, for the Church feels that it has been imposed upon it and therefore does not belong to it.48

These comments are an indictment of current Methodist structures and surely an indication of where fundamental change is needed.

There is the failure of the current system. Grundy notes two aspects of multi-congregational ministry that are relevant to the searching for a different model of ministry in the British Methodist system. He comments, “Where one stipendiary minister has ‘charge’ or, as I want to say, ‘oversight’ of between four and 20 congregations in nearly as many parishes, something new is needed.”49

The author of this paper serves four congregations. When he leaves in 2019 the responsibility for these would normally have to be spread among the other circuit ministers. This paper is a challenge to consider the other possible multi-congregational models along the lines that Grundy suggests. He comments on the challenges of the situation where individual congregations share one priest, the situation that is norm in Methodism. He notes “without doubt this is the most

49 Ibid., 36.
challenging pastoral situation. Here the traditional pattern of clerical ministry is stretched to breaking point and beyond.”

Grundy sees three overarching roles for what he calls oversight to manage the present, nurture identity, and create the future. The solution must be local leadership. A Jewish leader summed up the direction best. Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the Commonwealth wrote in *The Times* of August 18, 2012 that a different way of thinking was required that “breaks away from the hierarchical relationship of leaders and followers and builds on the Hebrew concept of collective responsibility. In other words, to watch ‘over one another in community.’”

There are challenges in a congregation not having its own resident minister. Grundy lists some twelve of these. This summary highlights four which need to be part of the re-structuring thinking of the Bury Circuit:

Firstly, how to overcome a sense of loss. “Something is lost when a personal one-to-one relatedness with the stipendiary minister is no longer possible. . . . It may be a vocational loss also for those who are ordained, many of whom experience the call to ministry as a pastoral one combined with a sacramental and preaching role.” Secondly, how to provide adequate pastoral care without the presence of a full-time resident minister. Thirdly, how to delegate with trust. “It can be resolved by establishing a new working relationship with church officers and key congregational members.” Fourthly,

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50 Ibid., 37.
51 Ibid., 30.
52 Ibid., 27.
how to sense direction with an absent full-time minister; how to remain outward facing—and not concerned mainly with its own needs and survival.\(^{53}\)

**Ministry in a Post–Christendom, Post–Modern World**

In this section, the challenges and opportunities facing the church in a multi-faith, post-Christendom, Postmodern world will be reviewed through the authors of two books, one specifically on the challenges of Postmodernism, the other focussing on being Missional.

James K A Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*

The book\(^{54}\) considers three slogans of postmodernism associated with three philosophers which it then studies:

- “There is nothing outside the text”—Derrida.
- Postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives”—Lyotard.
- “Power is knowledge”—Foucault.

“When Derrida claims that there is nothing outside the text, he means there is no reality that is not always already interpreted through the mediating lens of language. Textuality is linked to interpretation. Everything is subject to our interpretation; everything must be interpreted in order to be experienced. . . . The world is a kind of text

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\(^{53}\) Ibid., 7–12.

requiring interpretation.”55 “The fact that something is a matter of interpretation does not mean that an interpretation cannot be true or a good interpretation.”56 Preaching the Word of God is not just about explaining what the text meant for its original audience but applying that Word to current situations. One of the great preachers of twentieth century, Stephen Olford, in his book Preaching the Word of God describes the model for preaching. He is clear that preaching is primary, and expository preaching is paramount; and he sees in Jesus Christ, “the Prince of all expositors.” Olford develops his thesis by discussing what he refers to as the master, the method, and the marvel of biblical exposition. Referring to the master of biblical exposition, Olford points out that the master (the Lord Jesus) in his preaching expounded in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself; Jesus was a biblical preacher. Considering the method Olford describes how He (Jesus) expounded...the Scriptures. He explains that expounded means to interpret. The marvel of biblical exposition according to Olford is the warming of hearts, a blessing on homes, and a message of encouragement and hope.57 Preaching is interpretation and application. Sadly, it seems that too many sermons are just exposition with little application. Every sermon must address the question so what? How does a congregation respond to God’s Word?

The second postmodern claim, attributed to Lyotard, is about metanarratives. Generally, metanarratives refer to big stories. Smith rejects this as a valid interpretation

55 Ibid., 39.
56 Ibid., 44.
of Lyotard’s thinking on metanarratives. “What is at stake for Lyotard is not the scope of these narratives but the nature of the claims they make.”\(^{58}\) For Lyotard, metanarratives are a contemporary idea: they are stories that not only tell a big story—premodern stories do that—but also claim to be “able to legitimate or prove the story’s claim by universal reason. . . .[However] the biblical narrative and Christian faith claim to be legitimated not by an appeal to a universal, autonomous reason but rather by an appeal to faith.”\(^{59}\)

Finally, Smith considers the Statement by Foucault that “power is knowledge” reversing Francis Bacon’s proclamation that knowledge is power. “Michael Foucault’s \textit{Discipline and Punishment} has become an analogous anthem for postmodernity across the disciplines, from criminal justice to education.”\(^{60}\) But the goal of Christianity is not power, as under Christendom. The goal of Christian discipleship is not to train people to think the right way, have greater biblical knowledge, or to believe the right things, but to form them into the kinds of people that God has created, and Christ has redeemed, them to be. “The ultimate goal of sanctification and discipleship is to shape us into a certain kind of person; one who is like Jesus, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), loving God and neighbor; caring for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (Mic. 6:8).”\(^{61}\) Smith sums up the book with reference to the opportunities, not the fear, that postmodernity brings:

The radically orthodox church, then, is not traditionalist, even if it is traditioned; it is not a rote system of repetition but a creative repetition of the core features of what constitutes us as the people of God; it is not a nostalgic retreat into ‘the way

\(^{58}\) Smith, 64.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 67–68.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 87.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 106.
we used to do it’ but a dynamic reappropriation of ancient practices as the very material means to be formed differently, as agents who will counter the practices of modernity’s market and empire. The radically orthodox church is the space for the formation of postmodern catholics.\textsuperscript{62}

Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, \textit{The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21\textsuperscript{st}–Century Church}

This is the second edition (2013) of the book, originally published in 2003. In writing this second edition, the authors “acknowledge that [they] were rather too quick in dismissing existing traditional churches and their leaders from being able to re-missionalize what they were doing” . . . and that “none were more surprised than us when it became something of a defining text for the missional church movement as a whole.”\textsuperscript{63}

The book is a radical call to do something different. Einstein suggested “the kind of thinking that will solve the world’s problems will be of a different order to the kind of thinking that created those problems in the first place” “If Einstein was right, then the problems of the church, like all real problems in any context, cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created those problems in the first place.”\textsuperscript{64} The authors reject the Christendom model of church as not being biblical. “The Christendom-mode church has these three flaws in its DNA—it is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical.”\textsuperscript{65} Under attractional ministry, the church provides interesting programmes that will attract people inside a church building and there they will meet God and discover fellowship;

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 18.
dualistic is that it separates sacred from secular or profane, holy from the unholy, those in from those out; hierarchical is that leadership is top down and not priesthood of all believers.

There is the call to be radically different. The church must be missional. The attitude has to be “If they won’t come to us, we have to go to them. . . . That is why we propose that a radical shift needs to take place in this time—a shift from the attractional mode to an incarnational one.\textsuperscript{66} “The greatest argument for the case of incarnational mission in the end is the undeniable fact that it was the missional mode in which God himself engaged the world; it should be no less ours!”\textsuperscript{67}

“The advent of postmodernism has raised within the West many expectations for an experiential, activist form of religious, mystical experience. The Christian church has not met these expectations, though it could be argued that for a brief time some forms of Pentecostalism came closer than the rest of the church. . . . D.H. Lawrence said as long ago as 1924, ‘The adventure has gone out of the Christian venture.’\textsuperscript{68} To do this the church instead should “place high value on communal life, more open leadership structures, and the contribution of all the people of God. It will be radical in its attempts to embrace biblical mandates for the life of locally based faith communities. . . . The missional church will be adventurous, playful, and surprising.”\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 22.
There are two significant aspects that relate very specifically to this project. Primarily, is a call to return to the person of Jesus. The authors comment that “Jesus has generally been read through dogmatic ontological frames (as in the creeds) or through the structures of Paulinism (as in the Reformation), both we believe obscuring the primary historical portrait of Jesus found in the Gospels.” In calling for this return to the Jesus, the focal point for Christian faith, the authors note, “Christianity is not a doctrine but a person to whom I entrust myself without reserve.” “We believe in the need for the recovery of a messianic spirituality, one rooted primarily in the life and teaching of Jesus himself.”

There is also a call for different paradigm of leadership. The authors are very keen on the five-fold leadership in Ephesians 4:11–13—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, to which they use the title APEST. They “think it is a legacy of the Christendom mode that sees Christian community in terms of a triangle hierarchy, with pastors–teachers at the pinnacle.” [The point is also made that] “in planting incarnational churches that the leaders select a team only on the basis of a clear, demonstrated commitment to stated philosophy and vision.”

The authors return many times to the issue of leadership. Already mentioned is the call to APEST leadership; they then state “we argue that the development of a new kind of leadership is possibly the single most important question of strategy in this

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70 Ibid., 143.
71 Ibid., 144.
72 Ibid., 147.
73 Ibid., 91.
decade, and whether the church respond correctly or not will determine to some extent its survival as a viable expression of the gospel in the years to come.”

Returning to APEST, they comment that “the role of the evangelist has been marginalized and made itinerant rather than localized. And we see it as even more concerning that the functions of prophet and apostle have been ignored by mainstream churches altogether.” One of the challenges for the church is to change the way the congregation relate to the minister.

To many, the minister is understood as pastor and teacher. He/she is there to preach and teach the congregation and to care for them, a personal chaplain that church members are paying to provide them with pastoral care and to pray for them. The rediscovering of the roles of apostles, prophets, and evangelists is needed for the church to be missional. It is not just the minister who will have these gifts. “There are no clergy and no laity in the New Testament—all are ministers.”

This is a book that sets a radical agenda.

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74 Ibid., 206.
75 Ibid., 209.
76 Ibid., 212.
CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF THE RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVE

The first part of this chapter will consider the biblical basis of leadership. This transitions to a review of spiritual gifts given for building up the church, linked into the Protestant call to the priesthood of all believers. The later part of this chapter consists of a summary of Wesley’s practical theology. Wesley built his Methodist Societies on the five pillars of field preaching, society meetings on Sunday, class meetings, intentional visitation, and social engagement; the contemporary application of these pillars will be considered. What are known as the four all’s of Methodism will be noted; these embrace the “doctrine of original sin, universal salvation, assurance, and Christian perfection.”\(^1\) The calling of God on the contemporary Methodist Church will be examined with a particular reference to the church being a discipleship movement focused on mission, to pick on the current tag line for the Methodist Church.

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Biblical Basis

This section, under several sub-headings, elucidates God’s instructions on leadership as set forth in Scripture.

Leadership in the Bible

A key biblical image is that of shepherd.2 Paul instructs the elders of the church at Ephesus to: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28). That involves protecting the flock from false teachers, having enough biblical knowledge so to do, being spiritually alert to attacks by the enemy (Acts 20:31). It means feeding the flock—the early church devoted itself to the apostles teaching (Acts 2:42). Christian converts need to grow as disciples of Jesus; teachers are needed. It means caring for those in need, again quoting Paul, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak” (Acts 20:35); that means loving the people, praying for them, and being with them. This task will be demanding and can only be done through the Holy Spirit: “To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29). The Methodist Ordination service reflects this: “This ministry will make great demands upon you and those close to you, yet in all this, the Holy Spirit will sustain you by his grace.”3


Jesus calls for a different way of leadership. Leadership that the world values is a lording it over the people, having authority and power over the people, and becoming an oppressor over the people as the people become dependent on those leaders (Luke 22:25). Kingdom leadership is one of service: “But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

Jesus’ picture of leaders is so at variance with the way the world sees leadership, authority, and lordship. “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.’” (Mark 10:42–44). This is echoed by Peter: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2–3). This emphasis on weakness is illustrated in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. There is power through weakness in the gospel illustrated by the cross (1 Cor. 1:18, 24). There is power through weakness in Christians as God chooses weak to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27). There is the weakness that Paul sees in himself—“I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom. . . I came to you in weakness and fear, with much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:1–3).

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4 John Stott, Basic Christian Leadership (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 38.
This is servant leadership, and Paul uses language that picks up the idea of slavery. “Paul sets his leadership of the churches in the language of servanthood. This includes submission to Christ as Lord (δουλος), sacrifice and hardship for the sake of others (διακονος), suffering as a witness to the greater Servant (υπηρετης), accountability to faithfully carry out his mission (οικετης) and the priestly offering of worship to God (λειτουργος).”

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul sets out four essentials of authentic ministry. Firstly, ministers are the servants of Christ (4:1). To quote George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, “I remain convinced that above all else the [minister’s] training must take the student more deeply and challengingly into relationship with Jesus.” Secondly, ministers are the stewards of the Revelation (4:1–2), entrusted with the secret things of God, and so called to teach the people. Then, ministers are the refuse of the world (4:8–13). Paul describes in verses 11–13 how he is treated—hungry, thirsty, brutally treated, persecuted, slandered, the refuse of the world. That sounds different from the expectation of most British ministers. Finally, ministers are the fathers of the church family (4:14–21), loving parents, and pastors to the church family rather than disciplinarians.

There is a plurality of leadership. The Bible does not recognise singular leadership. So, James instructs those sick to “call for the elders of the church” (James 5:14). Paul appoints a council of elders for each new church: “Paul and Barnabas

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6 Stott, 100ff.

appointed elders for them in each church” (Acts 14:23). When passing near Ephesus Paul summoned the “elders of the church,” not the minister, for a final meeting (Acts 20:17,28). 1 Timothy 5:17 shows a plurality of leadership “The elders who direct the affairs of the church” (1 Tim. 5:17).8

There are three passages where qualifications for leadership are set out. The passages are 1 Timothy 3:2–7; Titus 1:6–9, and 1 Peter 5:1–3. These qualifications can be divided into three broad categories—moral and spiritual character, gifts and abilities, and God-inspired drive and motivation.9 So moral and spiritual character should be above reproach, true to their marriage, having integrity, self-controlled with regard to use of money and alcohol, and spiritual maturity being devout, righteous, hospitable and morally beyond reproach. In terms of abilities there are basically three—the management of the household, the providing an example of Christian living, and able to teach and defend the Christian faith. The final area of Spirit-given motivation—there had to be a call from God and the person must be entering the role on the basis of service.

Mission and Ministry in the New Testament

Mission is at the heart of Jesus and indeed the early church. Luke records Jesus’ first public act was in his home town of Nazareth when on the Sabbath day he was in the synagogue and read from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the

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year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19). Jesus concludes with the words, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21b). Jesus calls his first disciples and promises Simon that “from now on you will catch men” (Luke 5:10b). He sends out the Twelve and “he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and cure disease and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick” (Luke 9:1–2). Later he sends out seventy-two others and sends them out with the charge, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers few. Ask the lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). Jesus also points to how we, as his contemporary disciples, will be judged by the way our faith is applied in continuing the missional ministry of Jesus (Matt. 25: 31–46). After the resurrection Jesus tells his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they are filled with the Holy Spirit and then “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his [Christ’s] name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Acts continues the same theme as Jesus promises “power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Many early missionaries took up this mission, but through the biblical record, most is known about Paul. Paul’s aim was to move through the Gentile countries of the Roman empire, arriving eventually in Spain. Paul’s strategy was to settle for a time in one of the great cities of the empire and then using other helpers and converts to radiate out to the smaller towns of that region.10 The spread of the Christian gospel was aided by the first-rate Roman road system, by Roman peace (Pax Romana), and by the wide spread

international language of the time, Greek. Modern missionaries have to spend time
learning the local language; the early Christian missionaries could communicate almost
everywhere in Greek.  

There were no organised missionary societies but the church grew
through evangelical preaching, the use of homes for Christian meeting offering warmth,
welcome and a non-threatening atmosphere, personal testimony, social service, and
personal contact and example.

In later times, evangelism was reduced to social service as the proclamation of the
uniqueness of Jesus Christ was being removed. This contrasts with the 1974 Lausanne
congress on world evangelism which includes the statement that “evangelism itself is the
proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to
persuading people to come to him personally and be reconciled to God.”
Edward Smither notes the conclusion about mission set out by Harvard Professor William
Hocking: “We believe that the time has come to set the educational and other
philanthropic aspects of mission work free from organized responsibility to the work of
conscious and direct evangelism.”

After Pentecost the early church was a missional church. Dana Robert notes how
mission became the story of the church. “The idea of ‘mission’ is carried through the

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12 Ibid., 10.


New Testament by 206 references to the term ‘sending.’ The main Greek verb ‘to send’ is *apostollein*. Thus, *apostles* were literally to spread the ‘Good News’ of Jesus’ life and message.”¹⁶ The expansion of the church is noted in a letter from the pagan Governor Pliny of Bithynia to Roman Emperor Trajan in 1112AD. He notes that Christians were “present in the towns and cities and could be found on every level of society in his province.”¹⁷

**Spiritual Gifts**

In Paul’s letters there are several lists of gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12–14, there are four lists of gifts, at 1 Corinthians 12:8–11, then 1 Corinthians 12:28, again in verse 29, and still another in 14:26. There are also lists of gifts in Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6–8. All the lists are different and no one gift is on all the lists. There is also a seeming randomness about the lists. So, for example in 1 Corinthians 12:28, he refers to apostle, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles and then adds helping others and administering, before the gift of tongues.

When the author of this paper moved to the city of Derby to serve a strong evangelical/charismatic church as pastor, he was faced with a church that believed in spiritual gifts. The church taught that spiritual gifts were a separate collection of abilities, that they were given by the Holy Spirit, and were given to edify, build up, the people of the church. A specific group of gifts were rooted in all believers. Church leaders had the

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task of enabling each believer to discover their spiritual gift and then offer that gift for service within the church. To do this each person would complete a spirit gift inventory and be interviewed by a church leader. Card indexes were kept for each member of the church to record their gift.

It is Jim Horsthuis\(^\text{18}\) who challenges this view of spiritual gifts. He points to the link in Greek between the word for gifts and that for grace—the Greek word for grace is charis, while the word charismata is the word Paul uses sometimes for gifts. “In this view the genesis of leadership does not come through proper education, securing positions of power, or even discerning implanted spiritual gifts. The genesis of leadership is within the Triune God. Christians do not lead for God, or in light of God, but as participants with God.”\(^\text{19}\) Graham Buxton writes, “To have a vision for ministry is to be envisioned by God for his ministry.”\(^\text{20}\) Horsthuis sums things up, “Our giftedness, then, is caught up in the flow of God's grace as the Spirit uses all that we are—not just the abilities he implants—to make God's grace real in the specific situations in which we live and minister. In this way we participate in whatever means with God as he directs our service in the church and to the world.”\(^\text{21}\) This so broadens the idea of our sharing in the Missio Dei.

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., 86.


\(^{21}\) Horsthuis, 102.
Priesthood of all Believers

Luther in 1520, published three works that called for an upheaval in the understanding given by the mediaeval catholic church. As Cyril Eastwood has explained, “It seemed to Luther that a massive barrier made up of Church, Priesthood and Sacraments, had been raised up between the believer and Christ.”22 Luther sought to remove what he saw as barriers of the church’s priesthood and sacraments by arguing that every Christian is a priest. He wrote in To the Christian Nobility, “There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular.”23 He referred to 2 Peter 2:9 for the evidence for the common priesthood of believers, “You are a royal priesthood, a priestly realm.”

This then leaves the question as to the need for and function of the ministers/priests of the church. This question is tackled by Mark Rogers writing in the Westminster Theological Journal:

With such a strong view of the ministry duties given to all Christians, the question arises, what place was there for a formal ministry in the theology of Luther? Part of the answer is that official ministers were to carry out the priestly functions on behalf of the congregation. The official ministry had a delegated authority from the common priesthood. Luther explains, ‘For none of us is born as apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor through baptism, but we are all born simply as priests and clerics. Afterward, some are taken from the ranks of such born clerics and called or elected to these which they are to discharge on behalf of all of us’ (emphasis mine).24

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The main purpose for this delegation of ministry, Luther says, is good order. If all Christians tried to carry out the offices of the priest, “there might be shameful confusion among the people of God, and a kind of Babylon in the church, where everything should be done in order.”

Such statements are a challenge to the contemporary church that can see church as synonymous with its minister. Alexander Strauch rejects this,

Unlike Israel, which was divided into sacred priestly members and lay members, the first century Christian church was a people’s movement. . . . It is an immensely profound truth that no special priestly or clerical class in distinction from the whole people of God appears in the New Testament. Under the new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, every member of the Church of Jesus Christ is a holy saint, a royal priest, and Spirit-gifted member of the body of Christ. . . . Yet it is deeply ingrained in the minds of many Protestants that only the ordained clergymen is qualified to pastor a church, lead in worship, administer the Lord’s Supper, pronounce the blessing, preach, and baptize and that the believing community as a whole is unfit to carry out these functions.

The question must be asked as to how the church moved into the hierarchical structure that exists. One author sees this as due to the delay of the expected Parousia. “The fire of expectation had been banked; the conviction that time was short, that the Christians’ sufferings were merely flaws attaching to an interim, had gone begging. . . . ‘Sitting it out’ demanded order.”

So Clement of Rome called his people to “give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons.” To guarantee and justify the purity of

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26 Strauch, Biblical Leadership, 111.

27 Roy Harrisville, Ministry in Crisis: Changing perspectives on Ordination and the Priesthood of all Beliers (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 42.

doctrine that had been handed down without error or loss, Hegesippus is noted for a five-volume set of books, listing ecclesiastical history including a list of bishops back to the apostles.

A Review of Methodist History and Beliefs

England in the eighteenth century was a place of contrasts. In the countryside, successful agricultural methods brought wealth and gracious living to the land owners while their labours lived in extreme poverty and squalor. In towns, the Industrial Revolution demanded ever-increasing numbers of workers who were herded into insanitary communities with few provisions for somewhere to live, for health, education, and where there was no distinction between the expected working capacities of men, women, and little children. The business of the Church of England was to minister to spiritual needs and provide moral guidance. There were dissenting chapels but these were strictly controlled. There was no overall leadership in the Church of England and so each bishop did what was right in his eyes. Most bishops spent most of their time in London and rarely visited the parishes. Even in the well-run parishes, holy communion was rarely celebrated more than once a quarter.²⁹

John Wesley’s father, Reverend Samuel Wesley, was Rector of Epworth for thirty-eight years. He was a faithful pastor but not very successful. He married Susanna Annesley. She produced nineteen children; John was the fifteenth (born 1703) and Charles the eighteenth (born 1707). Aged ten, John went to Charterhouse in London and then to Christ Church, Oxford. He was ordained deacon in 1725 but in 1726, having been

elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, he turned to teaching and lectured on Greek and Philosophy. He returned to Oxford having been ordained priest in 1728 and joined Charles in his religious society where they met to pray, share communion, and discuss the Bible and other religious books. This group attracted several nicknames—the Enthusiasts, the Bible Moths, the Holy Club, and the Methodists. John and Charles did have an unsuccessful two years in Georgia, where they tried to minister as if they were still in Oxford. They returned to England, failures. Back in England, John met Peter Böhler, a Moravian. Wesley had thought of giving up preaching, struggling with belief. Böhler significantly advised Wesley, “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.” On May 24, 1738, God intervened, as Wesley noted in his journal, an experience that Wesley described as his heart strangely warmed. Methodist frequently refer to this as Wesley’s conversion while others describe it as Wesley’s call to his evangelistic ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

John & Charles Wesley are associated with the evangelical revival but its original leader was not John Wesley but George Whitefield. Whitefield was led to Bristol, to the coal miners of Kingswood Chase. Whitefield was banned from pulpits in the area, denounced for what was referred to as enthusiasm. He was blessed though with significant results as many became Christians. Knowing that he would be travelling out of England to Georgia, he invited John Wesley to Bristol to continue the work.

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Wesley had a gift for organisation, mission, and discipleship. At the heart of his organisation were five ‘pillars.’ These were field preaching, Societies meeting on Sunday, Class Meetings, intentional visitation, and social engagement.

1. Field Preaching. With his willingness to preach in the open air, Anglican pulpits having been closed to him, field preaching became the way that Wesley and his fellow preachers spread the gospel message throughout the land. Wesley came to treasure a key maxim, “Go not to those who want you, but to those who want you most.”

On January 2, 1743, Wesley preached at Epworth, the place where his father had been rector. He was not given access to the church and so, as his journal records,

About eight I preached from my father’s tomb on Hebrews viii.11. Many from the neighbouring towns asked if it would not be well, as it was sacrament Sunday, for them to receive it. I told them, ‘By all means: but it would be more respectful first to ask Mr. Romley, the curate’s leave.’ One did so, in the name of the rest; to whom he said, ‘Pray tell Mr. Wesley, I shall not give him the sacrament; for he is not fit.’

Today the Methodist Church is rediscovering a contemporary equivalent of field preaching—going to where people are and not assuming that they will come to the church building. So, Methodism is developing chaplaincies in various places, going into schools that is still possible in the U.K., organising church in public houses, visiting residential homes, and knocking on the doors of the communities to offer a Christian gift at Christmas, Easter, and Halloween.

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31 Ibid., 57.
2. Societies meeting on Sundays. The Methodist preaching service, held at a different time from the services of the parish church, became increasingly popular. Methodist services were known for having a “vast crowd of people who had for the most part never been seen in church, to have them singing noisy hymns, to produce outbursts of religious fervour, . . . to preach things which sounded dangerously near the suggestion that Jack is as good as his master.”

Regrettably much modern Methodist worship is uninspiringly predictable and dated, but where a church is seeking renewal in its mission, a significant part will be to renew its worship.

3. Class Meetings. Part of the Wesley genius was the weekly class meeting. It meant that every week, every Methodist member was held accountable for and supported in their faith. Class meetings, as small groups, did decline but are now being rediscovered as key to discipleship. In the U.K., the biggest church is probably St. Thomas’s, Crookes, Sheffield. In that church, members are expected is to be a part of a small group. Some growing churches, for example Community Church, Derby, see their small group as church with the Sunday gathering being a celebration.

4. Intentional Visitation. Wesley’s Class meeting and his Bands provide pastoral care for all. The need for such care continues to be recognised, although organised in different way.

5. Social Engagement. “John Wesley believed both in the experience of faith—an emotional experience—and its practice—a program of action. In his mind, the four greatest evils of his day were poverty, war, ignorance, and disease. For more than half a

33 Davies, Methodism, 106.
century he waged war on these enemies of society, and in his struggles the social conscience of today was born.”  

Today, Methodist Churches are rediscovering a ministry to the poor, with food banks, drop-in centres, lunch clubs, soft-play centres, etc.

**Methodist Fundamental Beliefs**

Any theologian’s understanding of salvation will be shaped by his views regarding such matters as the Person of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of grace and sin, election, the nature of the church and the means of conversion. . .. In the Methodist tradition there are often said to be four doctrinal emphases, and all of them mention salvation. These are often referred to as the Fours All’s:

- All men can be saved
- All men can be saved by grace through faith
- All men may know that they are saved
- All men may be saved to the uttermost

Wesley was Arminian in theology; he rejected Calvin’s ideas of predestination and believed that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will be saved. The conviction was that God so loved the world and wants all people to have a restored relationship with Him. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32 emphasis added). Jesus promises the Holy Spirit who will “will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8 emphasis added) and not just God’s predestined elect. Paul in writing to Timothy states God our Saviour

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“who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4 emphasis added). Peter writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9 emphasis added). Wesley had “a vision of God as unsurpassed grace, generosity, and goodness that was central to his conception of the gospel. God loved every single human creature he had made, and through grace every human agent could experience the washing away of their sins and come to live the love of God in the world.”

Under Arminianism, the Holy Spirit can be resisted. Sin itself is resisting the will of God. When Jesus’ teaches about his coming suffering and death, Peter’s response is to take him “on one side and began to rebuke him.” (Mark 8:32). Jesus reply was “out of my sight, Satan!” When Jesus recounts the parable of the wedding banquet, “those who had been invited to the banquet . . . refused to come” (Matt. 22:3). As Jesus prays for Jerusalem—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,” he comments on his hopes for his people but “you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37). Jesus states that only those who accept him will be saved: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:51). In Romans 5:1–2, a key text for the Reformers, people are saved through faith, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” Wesley, in one of sermons, states, “I am persuaded every child of God has

had, at some time, life and death set before him, eternal life and eternal death; and has in himself the casting voice."  

"[Wesley’s] idea of grace is bound up with his Arminian view of election and the need to emphasize the part which man is to play. Grace gives men the ability to cooperate with grace."  

The belief that God wants to save everyone was key to Wesley’s ministry and surely is key to missional thinking in the church today.

Wesley’s second ‘all’ concerned the Reformation teaching that all are saved by grace through faith. Wesleyan theology kept together four ideas, “a radical doctrine of sin, salvation through grace alone, giving all the credit to God for salvation, and human responsibility if we fail to gain salvation. . . . Wesley insists that the first moves back to sanity and health are, as it were, entirely the work of God. For this to work, the prevenient grace of God must indeed be universal and irresistible.”  

Methodists speak of prevenient grace, grace given to every human being. In Wesley’s time such grace was called preventing grace, meaning coming before (Latin, preveniens). This is God’s grace coming before our believing in Christ.  

Wesley was convinced that God was at work everywhere, that the division that Christendom saw between sacred and secular is wrong. He wrote, “Nothing is so small or insignificant in the sight of men as not to be an object

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39 Abraham, Wesley for Armchair Theologians, 56.

of the care and providence of God, before whom nothing is small that concerns the happiness of any of his creature.”

It is important to note that Wesley was committed to works. “Faith without works is dead, so that faith is never an inert affair; faith is always the faith that works by love. Faith that fails to express itself in inward disposition and outward behavior is mere assent, mere dead orthodoxy dressed up as the faith of the church. . . . At the final judgement we would, as Jesus and Paul insisted be judged on what we did.”

Note that both faith and works are the consequences of the gracious love and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and world.

Wesley also believed that Christians can know that they are saved; this is the doctrine of assurance. While certainty/assurance may not be popular in our postmodern culture, for Wesley it was significant. He proclaimed three major aspects of New Testament teaching about assurance—firstly our sharing in the life of Christ, secondly concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and thirdly concerning the nature of life after death.

It is John’s gospel where the closeness of a relationship between Jesus and his followers is emphasised. John talks about sheep and shepherd (John 10:1–18); the commitment by Jesus “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28); and Jesus high-priestly prayer for “those who

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42 Abraham, Wesley for Armchair Theologians, 77.
43 Townsend, Our Traditions of Faith, 82.
believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” This is echoed in 1 John 5:13f written to those “who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” This is the assurance Christ’s disciples have in their relationship with God. Paul takes up this same idea in his teaching of being “in Christ”—see Col. 2:20; 1 Cor. 6:17; and 2 Cor. 5:17.

Another aspect of the assurance of faith, the fact that a believer can know they are saved is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is Paul who refers to Christians having the “first-fruits” of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23), implying that the gift of the first fruit is a commitment to the whole. Paul refers to the Spirit as an ἀρράβων—a pledge or guarantee of the assurance of glory in the new age. Allied with the gift of the Spirit is the promise that if sons of God then believers are heirs. This is a powerful image. As Christians share in the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor. 4:7ff), they will also share in his glory. Paul states, “now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

The fourth of the ‘all’s’ concerns being saved to the uttermost. “In Wesley’s day it was called variously, Christian Perfection, Perfect Love, Holiness, Entire Sanctification, or just Sanctification.” Wesley spoke of Christian Perfection:

He could speak of Christian perfection, entire sanctification, perfect love, circumcision of the heart, fulfilling the law of Christ, holiness of heart and life, union with God, being filled with the Holy Spirit, loving God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves, and the like. His favorite rendering was the biblical phrase: having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.45

44 Ibid., 106.

45 Abraham, *Wesley for Armchair Theologians*, 87.
Wesley distinguishes justification and sanctification. The first brings forgiveness, but the second begins with new birth and leads to righteousness.

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: The former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time, neither of these is before the other: in the moment we are justified by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also ‘born of the Spirit;’ but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth.46

A final comment needs to be made in this section. Wesleyan theology is different, pragmatic, and open to the Spirit. The Methodist Church needs in many ways to look to its origins. Wesley was

Lutheran insofar as he insisted on justification as foundational; he was Reformed insofar as he believed that we shall be fighting sin to our dying day; he was Anglican in that he expected God to work objectively in the sacraments to mediate grace; he was Roman Catholic in that he held that conspicuous sanctity or goodness really is possible in this life; he was Pentecostal in that he stressed the pivotal role of explicit experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives; and he was Eastern Orthodox in that he saw human agents as genuinely acting through grace in the whole drama of salvation.47

“The tension between institution and effectiveness, between form and spirit, between maintenance and mission, between convention and innovation, between regulation and spontaneity, and between continuity and renewal, are still with us today in our ruminations on the nature of the church.”48


47 Abraham, Wesley for Armchair Theologians, 103.

48 Abraham, Wesley for Armchair Theologians, 119.
Contemporary Methodist Emphases

The British Methodist church has sought to define itself in what it describes as 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.”49 This is worked out in terms of worship, learning and care, service, and evangelism. In 2011, The General Secretary of the Methodist Church, Rev. Dr. Martyn Atkins, presented his annual report to the Methodist Conference. The Report, accepted by Methodist Conference, was entitled “Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission.” In this report, Atkins states,

Methodism started as a movement; a movement that, in obedience to God, wanted to make a difference in the world within communities and the lives of individuals. We still share that same purpose today. So it is important for us to regain something of that sense of movement as we seek, through words and deeds, to share the love of God. We want to be a Church that helps people become ‘Disciples of Christ’; disciples who share God’s longing for a world healed and made whole. 50

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PART THREE

RE–STRUCTURE FOR MISSION
CHAPTER 4

GOALS AND PLAN

Chapter 4 will develop a plan for a revised circuit structure for the Bury Methodist Circuit. Part of this plan will be presentations to all the fifteen circuit churches on how it cannot be business as usual. The normal Methodist way of dealing with a shortage of ministers involving spreading existing ministerial resources over an increasing number of churches is a recipe for accelerated decline. This project though is not solely to deal with a shortage of ministers. In addition, the plan will examine the changing needs for ministry in a post-modern, post-Christendom environment. Mission therefore needs to be at the heart of any plans; an emphasis on incarnational ministry will be highlighted. The Methodist Church is very clear about its aims—to make followers of Jesus Christ. Each church in Bury Circuit will be required to update a mission plan to make followers of Christ and the circuit leadership team will make assessments on priorities, allocation of ministerial resources, development of lay leaders, and the possible employment of lay leaders with specific gifts for specific responsibilities.

There is a second hope and vision behind this project. Although based at only one circuit in the Methodist Church, the bigger hope is that, by opening these discussions at a
local level, there will be a wider awareness of the theological thinking behind this project in the district that Bury Circuit is part of and maybe beyond that. This is not just a plan to cope with a shortage of ministers. It is a fundamental call to embrace the theology of the ministry of the people of God, and the encouragement of the ministry of lay people. The church is the people of God and this project is about enabling the people of God to embrace mission and discipleship. The project does not include any plans to embrace the wider Methodist Church; there may be such effects as a result of these discussions in Bury. However, at the end of the project, there will be a review of what has happened in the wider Methodist Church in terms of the development of the ministry of the people.

**Theological Implications Serving a Missional God**

This paper has shown that the conversion of Constantine changed things for the Christian church. Prior to Constantine the church suffered persecution but as Stuart Murray comments, it grew. “As in previous centuries, the attractive lives of Christians and their communities, the appeal of Christian theology in a culture reaching towards monotheism and the church’s capacity to transcend socio-economic and gender barriers were all factors in the appeal of fourth-century Christianity.”¹ After Constantine, the church grew in numbers, political power and wealth, although many who became members of the church had no spiritual experience or conversion. After Constantine, with

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its new political influence, the church faced a crisis in what it should be teaching. Murray suggests that post-Constantine the church leaders concluded,

New Testament teaching seemed designed for disciples in a non-Christian society, not a Christian Empire. Church leaders concluded that it offered no guidelines for constructing and running the sacral society emerging in the fourth century. New Testament writers apparently did not envisage the triumph of Christianity and provided no resources for developing a state religion.²

Britain became a Christian country. Mission became associated with foreign travel, the conversion of the heathen. Today, the national church, the Church of England, has advantages “which other religions can only dream: the history and heritage of a national Church; huge wealth and resources; a stake in about one third of schools; and deep insertion into the élite institutions of England—the monarchy, Parliament, the judiciary, public schools, Oxbridge, the armed forces, and so on.”³ The trend in Christian discipleship though is negative. Analysis of census data shows that for British people, born between 1900–1909, 84 percent saw themselves as Christian. For those born between 1985–1989, only 26 percent claimed Christian affiliation with 60 percent claiming no religious affiliation at all.⁴ A significant change came to the British church with the Baby Boomer generation who in the 1960s left the church in large numbers. A change has come in missional perception, realising that Britain is as much a mission field as is overseas. This is illustrated by a hymn “They kingdom come O God” written in

² Ibid, 112.
about 1860 which has a verse, “O’er heathen lands afar, thick darkness broodeth yet: Arise, O Morning Star, Arise, and never set!” This has more recently been changed to “O’er lands both near and far, thick darkness broodeth yet” . . . Christians no longer encounter heathens just overseas; it is now at home as well.

Attendance at Methodist Churches fell from 326,400 in October 2003 to 224,500 in October 2013. The age profile shows also that nearly 70 percent of Methodists are over sixty-six years old. In Britain one third of the population claim to be Church of England although “of those who say they are C of E, about 83 percent say that they do not go to church other than very occasionally—perhaps for a funeral.” The world changes; Christendom is fast dying. David Fitch, teaching at Fuller Seminary, stated that the Western world is now “post attractional, post-positional, and post-universal.”

Attractional is the mode of mission that using a church building to offer interesting and attractive programs will attract non-Christians. The Seeker Service was one such idea. Today, 90 percent of the population do not think about Sunday in terms of church going and have no sense of guilt about not going to church. Positional is the idea that the church has an authority to speak on major issues. Resolutions at Methodist Conferences interest no one except the keen members for whom Conference means something. In fact, the church is known more as a kill-joy, known more for what it opposes than what it

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7 David Frith, “Missional Ecclesiology” (lecture, Fuller Seminary, DMin class, September 122, 2016).
stands for. Methodism in the U.K. is known as anti-gambling and anti-alcohol. Universal is the idea that Christian language, the Christian story, Christian morality, and Christian ethics are accepted by all. Increasingly the universality of Christianity is not accepted. Indeed, many go further. Frost and Hirsch comment that “people these days don’t want to learn from experts or higher authorities, but from those who share the same life context and have found a way forward.”

The major change has to come from a switch from an attractional mode to an incarnational mode of mission. Again, Frost and Hirsch, “The greatest argument for the case of incarnational mission in the end is the undeniable fact that it was the missional mode in which God himself engaged the world; it should be no less yours!” It is no longer about the Christian community safely meeting in its building, inviting those outside to “join us for worship,” as many church notice boards suggest. It is about the church getting into a community to be alongside the people. Jesus did not stay at home in Capernaum and invite people to his house; he went where the people were, even to the tax collectors, the sick, those with evil spirits, and the prostitutes. As the current tag line of the Methodist Church states, a Discipleship Movement Focused on Mission, mission has got to be the priority, and the church needs to rediscover its role as a movement and be willing to change.

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9 Ibid., 60.
Robert Linthicum sees three sorts of church in terms of community involvement.\textsuperscript{10} The first is the church \textit{in} the community referring to location only. It is not involved in the community, most its members do not live in the community, and it is in the community but not of the community. The second is the church \textit{to} the community, where the church decides what the community needs and seeks to offer those solutions. The third is the church \textit{with} the community, where the church works with the community to discover the issues and work together to improve things. Gaspar Colón suggests that this leads to serving, sympathizing, and socializing. He warns, though, “A close examination of this dualistic model will show that the closer we get to serving, sympathizing, and socializing the farther we are from bidding people to follow Jesus (salvation and discipleship). Instead, the church needs a more holistic view of ministry that keeps every facet of Christ’s method centered on Jesus.”\textsuperscript{11}

Part of the challenge of incarnational ministry is becoming part of a community. The author of this paper has been in his current appointment for seven years, but to many he is still an outsider. In addition, he serves four separate churches, in four separate communities, as pastor. He and his wife live in one of those communities and his wife worships in the local Methodist church. For the other three churches, he is a visitor to that

\textsuperscript{10} R.C. Linthicum, \textit{Empowering the Poor: Community Organizing Among the City's “Rag, Tag, and Bobtail."} (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1991).
community. He visits the community, for worship, Bible study, church meetings and has become involved with a local school and a residents’ association, but at the end of the day, he leaves and goes home. He is not part of that community. This is mirrored in other professions that seek to serve the community. Police, social workers, doctors, school teachers rarely live in the community they are employed to serve.

Celtic Christianity can show a way ahead, being “more a movement than an institution, with small provisional buildings of wood and mud; a movement featuring laity more than clergy in ministry.” In addition, “they had little use for more than a handful of ordained priests, or for people seeking ordination; they were essentially lay movements.” Significantly though, Celtic Christianity focused on a ministry of Incarnation:

Celtic model for reaching people: (1) establish community with people or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith; (2) within fellowship, engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship; and (3) in time, as they discover that they now believe, invite them to commit . . . most people experience the faith through relationships, that they encounter the gospel through a community of faith, and that becoming a Christian involves a process that takes time.

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13 Ibid., 16.

14 Ibid., 43.
Goals

Missional

It is also a switch from maintenance to mission. So much time, attention, money and other resources are focused on keeping the show on the road, maintaining the building, supporting the ministers financially, being present to support church activities.

For Bury Circuit, a starting place was Jesus’ teaching in the parable of the sower. In looking to how to respond and share in what God is doing, the parable of the sower, or maybe better called the parable of the soils (Mark 4) was viewed. Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God. The seed is the same; the soil makes the difference. The parable shows that all soil has potential but some it needs clearing first, e.g. Paul experienced this when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul instructs Timothy in leadership. Having sowed the seeds, the seed needs water to flourish. The circuit faces the challenge as to how to prioritise efforts given that resources, like the water in the parable, are limited. Moving somewhat beyond Jesus’ parable, any gardener knows that different plants grow in different types of soil. This leads to the question about how this impacts ministry. Not every minister is suited for every situation and there is no universal right way to tackle mission. There is also the time aspect in Jesus’ parables involved in growing seeds. It is only when fruit starts to appear that results can be accessed; it would be premature to judge mission efforts too soon. Again, taking things forward, as any farmer needs to learn the ways of farming, so Christian people need to be taught and enabled to become deeper soil. If the soil is not dug over and tilled regularly then it will become compact and useless. Churches have a life cycle and many churches need a new vision. Part of the outworking of this is that there seems a complacency and lack of
passion, urgency, and commitment. In at least some of the churches or among some of its long-standing members. Although God brings new life in Christ, God works through his people in partnership and expects them to share in his work.

Focussed Resources

Though Wesley arranged his own preaching so it would not cause disruption to local Anglican services, the Bishop of Bristol still objected. Wesley responded, “The world is my parish.”15 Although John Wesley travelled over 4,000 miles annually and preached over 40,000 sermons, each Methodist Church is required to focus its work on the community that it seeks to serve in the name of the Lord. Like the parable of the sower, some ground is more conducive than other. In addition, there is only a finite amount of resources. The circuit needs to reduce the number of ministers it employs. Because of the Methodist requirement is to have a presbyter in pastoral charge of each church, and because of the practice that only ordained presbyters can preside at communion, the norm is to spread the number of churches over the remaining number of ministers. That would be a recipe for accelerated decline.

Instead, the intention is to focus ministerial resources on a limited number of churches. The plan is that no minister will serve more than two churches. The allocation of ministers to churches will be decided through a consultation process with the churches in terms of needs to fulfil mission plans. Ministers are by nature generalists. It has been said that clergy have so many demands. One analysis suggested sixty-five different

competencies are required and surely no one can have all these. The need is for ministers to lead to their strengths and not just fill gaps in pastoral care.

Instead lay people will be sought to serve. It has been shown that Methodism was a lay movement. Michael Henderson has looked at Wesley’s Class Meeting system and saw this had a number of important results. He noted,

Wesley so mobilized the entire Methodist membership that nearly every member had some share in the ministry of the congregation. . . . This sharing of the leadership role called for a totally different approach to spiritual and educational leadership. Rather than performing the ‘ministry’ themselves, the leaders’ main task was the training or equipping leaders at lower levels. . . . This concept of leadership alone was revolutionary enough to set Methodism apart from other sects which practices a one–person ministry.

In addition, the Class Meeting under Wesley brought an honesty, an openness and an accountability. “One of the remarkable features of the class meeting format was the realism about human nature that was built into its design. The Puritans had so much dread about human sinfulness that they failed to deal with it objectively; the deists either ignored or glossed over the seriousness of sinful behavior; but Wesley expected it and made explicit plans for its treatment in the class meeting”

Henderson comments that “the Methodist system of intensive groups was fine for gregarious people, but it was no place for a recluse or loner. It seems incredible, but every Methodist spoke at every meeting every week (except for society meetings).”

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16 Chris Adams, “Flourishing in Ministry” DMin Writing Retreat (lecture Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, April 22, 2018).


18 Ibid., 100.

19 Ibid., 140.
David S. Belasic wrote at the start of the third millennium that the church needed to develop a different basis, a different model of ministry that encourages its people to share together in ministry and service as people of God if the gospel is to move ahead, While there are different functions in the Body of Christ as the Church, it is a shared body, each member endowed with different parts and gifts with only one Head There is a real need for developing a more fully shared ministry among all the people of God. The biblical concept of shared ministry among all the people of God hasn’t always been widely received or practiced among us in the era of a churched culture. The Reformation teaching on justification by grace through faith caught on, but the Reformation teaching on the priesthood of all believers caught on only minimally, and the consequences, in my observation, are showing up.20

Belasic references the difficulty many pastors have in dealing with an inadequate commitment from the members of the church. This, he notes, often leads to an “abdication of responsibility to the pastor. After all that’s what he gets paid to do, he deals with ‘holy things’, he knows the Bible and can give the right answers. The end result means letting the pastor do the bulk of the congregation’s work—and becoming extremely busy, the harried pastor will be subject to criticism for overlooking the needs of some individual members, or coming to meetings not fully prepared.”21

Prayer

One of the challenges is about the need for the church to share in God’s Mission. It is God’s Mission and he invites us to participate with him in what he is doing in a

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21 Ibid.
community. It is easy for churches to make their own mission plans, to take on board the latest program from a large and therefore apparently successful church and then ask God to bless it. Instead mission thinking must start with God and the church’s seeking his plans for his church in a specific community; that means prayer.

It is acknowledged by this author that every church service in the circuit includes at least one element of prayer. That could be the Lord’s Prayer, prayers of adoration, thanksgiving or confession or prayers of supplication and intercession. In these the congregation pray for those who are ill and for peace in the world. Part of the concern though, is that so much of what purports to be prayer is at best talking at God, or at worst talking to the members of the congregation, but in the guise of prayer. It seems to this author that many of the church respond more like deists and not Christians. They believe in a God as they cannot make sense of creation otherwise, but that God is a distant disinterested deity who is not really involved in their lives. They are passive in prayer, not seeking God, not wrestling with God, not pleading with God to do something differently, as in Numbers 14:13–19. Fundamental to allocation of resources will be to churches who have church prayer times to seek God, to listen to God, to be open to God, and to be willing to risk things in faith for God.

**Plan**

**Building the Picture**

The first stage is to present to the circuit meeting and all its churches the rationale for the need to change the model of ministry. The circuit needs to hear the bad news. In particular, the circuit is running a significant deficit budget; this cannot continue
indefinitely. The number of ministers available in Methodist Stationing is below the number of circuits seeking ministers; in 2017 one third of vacancies could not be filled. This is projected to continue and deteriorate. This means the Methodist Church needs either more ministers or fewer appointments. Maybe though, God is calling Methodism to something new. Locally, the circuit needs to plan for the likely situation that when the next presbyter leaves the circuit, he or she will not be replaced. In several churches, there are difficulties in terms of finance, property issues, shortage of people to hold office, and of ageing and diminishing congregations. There is a concern that many churches are failing to recruit younger generations into the life and leadership of the church. At least 60 percent of the U.K. population is now reckoned to be beyond the reach of the churches. This proportion grows each year. The Bury Circuit probably has too many buildings. Finally, children grow up in Britain with many pressures, expectations, and demands. A Christian evangelist, Ben Jacks who works for the Message Trust in the U.K. illustrated this “a worldwide movement with a passion to share Jesus Christ with the hardest-to-reach young people, through creative mission, community transformation and Christ-centred enterprise.”

22 Jacks has said, “with every identity under the sun except their identity of God, our people live in fear. One in four girls in the U.K. aged fourteen has some sort of mental problem and the biggest killer of men under fifty-five is suicide. Teenagers spend 10 hours a day on digital media.”

23 Ben Jacks, “Preaching the Gospel Powerfully” (talk at Bolton Road Methodist Church, Bury, February 24, 2018).
Having painted the picture of reality of the church and contemporary society, a vision of the future needs to be given. Circuit leaders need to be like Martin Luther King who stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC and set a vision for the future in his “I have a dream” speech but at the same time was lobbying Congress and the President with the realities of life for black people in segregated U.S.A.

In the quotable phrase of N.T. Wright, God’s mission is the mission of “putting the world back to rights.”24 This is a mission that for human beings is impossible. No amount of human cleverness, no collection of spiritual programs, activities or courses, will mend the divide between us and God, and heal what is wrong with the world. For limited and sinful creatures, as all are, dealing with the results of sin is indeed an impossible mission. “But with God everything is possible” (Matt. 19:26). God alone can fix what mankind has broken. God alone can restore what is beyond human power. God alone can reconcile us to himself and bring reconciliation to a shattered world.

But, amazingly, God has chosen to use us for his mission. He has chosen us as members of his Impossible Mission Force. More accurately, we are part of God’s Possible Mission Force. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been drafted into the unique mission of God. To be sure, we cannot make reconciliation with God occur. That’s God’s job and he has accomplished it marvelously. Yet he has chosen us to be his agents of reconciliation who share in his mission of healing all creation (2 Cor 5:18-21).25

God works through his people, people whom he calls and who respond to that call in obedience and service. As God is God, he will provide for the work as long as his

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people are doing what he requires. Christians need to get their egos out of the way. Part of the new missional thinking in the church is described as Fresh Expressions.

The Church of England and the Methodist Church want to establish many different fresh expressions of church life in the next decade to carry the gospel to every part of our society. Fresh Expressions is a national initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York supported by the Methodist Council. Our aim is to resource and encourage a major movement of mission and change across the churches and this is one possible way. Thirteen percent of Methodists now are involved in Fresh Expressions of Church. A fresh expression of church is a new gathering or network that engages mainly with people who have never been to church. There is no single model, but the emphasis is on starting something which is appropriate to its context, rather than cloning something that works elsewhere. Over 3,000 of these new forms of church now exist in almost every denomination and tradition in the U.K.26

The second stage is the envisioning of the circuit leaders, the lay circuit stewards and the other ministers. This will be done by taking the circuit leadership for a two-day conference called “Navigating Change.” This is held at Swan Bank Church, Stoke-on-Trent. This Methodist Church has over the last ten years been reinvented to serve its local community of Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. This is a church that takes Wesley’s five pillars of mission and applies them to contemporary ministry situation. So as Wesley took to the open air to preach, so Swan Bank takes its service to a public park at least twice a year and visits all the homes in the immediate vicinity with gifts at Easter, Christmas and Halloween. Just as Wesley encouraged his people into Sunday worship, so Swan Bank has made worship, preaching and continuity of teaching a priority, in spite of the Methodist system of circuit lay preachers. Just as Wesley had his weekly Class Meetings,

so everyone at Swan Bank is encouraged into a small weekly group. Wesley prioritised pastoral care and visiting his people, so Swan Bank has a very thorough system of pastoral care. Finally, Wesley was committed to social action, supporting Wilberforce in the abolition of slavery, setting up schools, campaigning for prison reform. Swan Bank runs a counselling centre, the food bank, and now runs the local library for the community. The aim of this two-day conference at Swan Bank was to encourage the circuit leaders to think beyond the current situation, and to be encouraged to what is happening elsewhere.

**Missional Plan**

Each church was then required to produce a mission plan. To aid this and provide a basis for assessing these plans, guidelines need to be agreed about criteria that will be applied in the allocation of circuit resources. These guidelines were

- Everything in the church needs to be underpinned by prayer.
- The church needs to embrace what is referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Wesley built this on Anglican traditions and the resulting four components or “sides” of the quadrilateral are (1) scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience. Experience was the one added by Wesley; experience is the individual’s understanding and appropriating of the faith in the light of his or her own life. Faith must be more than head knowledge but experienced and lived out.
- Fundamental to mission is the guiding people on their journey to Jesus Christ. “The church is a community sent on a mission together: to keep on doing the ministry of Jesus. God has designed the church of Jesus Christ to be a ‘missional’
fellowship. The word ‘mission’ comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means ‘having been sent’.\(^{27}\) The mission plan produced by the leadership of each church needs to be alert to a post-Christendom model, that incarnation and not attractional are the foci of a church’s mission. Churches need to get out of the safety of their buildings and meet the community.

- The church’s role is not to just make converts but disciples. So, each church needs a programme of discipleship. Wesley called his people into sanctification, whereby a Christian, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, grows into Christ-likeness and ultimately perfect love.

- The church needs to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the profile of their community, the needs of the community, and how the church is working with the community to meet needs—determining what God is doing and joining in. Each of the circuit churches is in a unique situation; some are town centre churches, others serve a local community, but each serves a separate and identifiable community.

- There needs to be a willingness to change and embrace new ideas and take risks—e.g. new kinds of worship and/or community outreach.

- There needs to be a willingness to review positive and negative outcomes, and to learn for the future. Part of this learning will include a willingness to stop some activities and ministries that have now run their course.

• Evidence of a commitment to cooperate with other churches, both other Methodist churches but also churches of other denominations.

The circuit meeting agreed that each church council should present a church mission plan every three years. This can only be done after much prayer, seeking to share in the mission of God. This plan will cover several aspects, including current mission and discipleship activities in the church. It will focus also on future planned mission and discipleship activities, with details and timescale. There is an encouragement and necessity to fresh thinking about mission; willingness to take risks and attempt something new. Finally, and maybe most importantly, this feedback will enumerate resources in terms of money, and circuit staff time and gifts needed for this plan, given that these circuit and church resources are limited and finite. To facilitate and enable this process, a questionnaire was sent to all church leadership teams to guide these leadership teams in the process of thinking through and completing this plan. The questions were as follows:

Please answer these questions as fully as possible, noting that the whole submission must be no more than 3 pages and at least 12-point type.

1. Describe your church prayer initiatives and its prayer life.

2. Describe how your church is involved in guiding people on their journey to/with Christ that leads to deepening discipleship.

3. Describe how you understand the community you serve and how you are working with God in that community.

4. How have mission initiatives developed in your church in the last 2–3 years and how have you evaluated their success or failure and what have you learned?
5. What are the most significant challenges you see the church facing in the next 2–3 years?

6. What are your mission and ministry development plans for the next 2–3 years?

7. Finally, set down what are the resources from the circuit (in terms of presbyters/deacons/Lay Workers (paid or unpaid) and gifting/skills) that you would need to enable these development plans to move ahead.

Assessing the Consultation Results

The circuit leadership then had the task to read, share, and pray through these replies. In doing so, the aim was to allocate resources to missional churches. Certain principles were being laid down through this process. The overall number of ministers and the cost of ministers would have to be reduced, but no minister will serve more than two churches. Priority would be given to those churches that through prayer were seeking the Missio Dei for their church. It would not be enough just to discover what God was doing; churches can say the right things, talk seemingly endlessly in committees, but then not have the faith, energy or commitment to do anything. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). Priority would be given to mission with a focus on incarnational and not attractional thinking. Community involvement should be seen as important. Lay ministry must be encouraged. The church cannot grow if there is an insistence that everything is focused and is channelled through the minister. Methodism became a lay ministry movement and the author of this paper is convinced that God is calling the church to a new model of ministry that will be much less dependent on the clergy. Instead it will
involve all the members using their gifts and talents, their time, and commitment to be the church of Jesus Christ and together share the Good News. Part of the encouragement for lay leadership would certainly be in those churches that do not have a minister to lead. This would seek to build on the previous experiment of lay pastors in several churches. The circuit leadership needed to identify those churches where this was the way ahead. There would then the need to prepare job descriptions for the lay pastors, to recruit and to train these lay people. The job description needs to be locally focused on the mission plans and needs of the particular church. Part of this thinking would include a pilot project involving one church which will have a lay pastor. A pilot project would be instigated by recruiting a lay pastor in the immediate future and not wait until 2019. Part of what needed to be worked through is the provision of communion services in those churches where again an ordained presbyter would not be in immediate leadership.

Renewal in worship, as well as continuity in worship is central. The current system in the Methodist Church is highly dependent on its local preachers. Three out of four services in Methodism are taken by local preachers. This should be a strength, given that these men and women are rooted in the real world. However, what started with Wesley as local preachers has now developed into scattering preachers round the circuit. In Bury Circuit, the average local preacher leads worship and preaches in each church on average once a year. They can have little pastoral link with the church, limited knowledge of the discipleship needs of the church, limited awareness of worship style, and almost certainly no information of what was covered in worship in previous weeks.

The system does suit some preachers who may have to prepare just one new sermon a year but does not focus on what God might be doing. To try and provide some
continuity, the Methodist Church does have a system of lectionary readings from the Bible. This is designed so that there is not, for example, a sermon on the Good Samaritan every week. By following the lectionary, then most of the Bible is covered in a three-year period. It is a system that does not allow for discipleship development, does not permit a church to focus on a particular worship style, does not encourage pastoral links between preacher and congregation, and does not provide a situation where a member might invite a friend or neighbour with any certainty that they will not be embarrassed by the service.

Basis of the Decisions to be Taken

The process will be then that the circuit leadership will prayerfully review all the fifteen church submissions. They will decide on priorities on the basis of the above. They will then allocate ministers to churches, noting again that no minister will serve more than two churches. They will consider the possibility of employing lay workers with specific gifts to other churches moving forward in mission plans. They will then review how to ensure pastoral care of the other churches and need to decide on how to serve needs for communion services. They will consider a pilot project for one church in terms of a lay worker. And the final task will be to consider worship life of the churches with the aim of providing continuity of teaching, leading, and worship. This will then be reported back to circuit meeting and the churches.
CHAPTER 5
MINISTRY OUTCOMES

The first section of this chapter looks at the expected outcomes. The second section looks at actual outcomes and lessons learned. This first section notes first the target audience. There is a focused specific target as the Bury Circuit but the project is significantly wider in its audience as it challenges current Methodist thinking on leadership with its clergy emphasis and concentration. The chapter summarises the key theological concepts behind the project—mission/discipleship and lay leadership. The chapter then enumerates the preferred outcomes both in terms of the local Bury Circuit but also and less tangibly the effect on the wider Methodist Church.

Target Audience

This project is led by the superintendent minister of Bury Methodist Circuit and the circuit leadership team (CLT). This team consists of the circuit ministers plus lay circuit stewards. It is their task to lead the circuit. The CLT resources the circuit churches in terms of ministers and finance. The circuit “is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission and mutual encouragement and help” (Standing order 500(1)). This specific
The project concerns all the fifteen churches in the Bury Circuit. At the end of this project—August 2019—all these fifteen churches will have in place the circuit resources they will have to further the work of mission and ministry.

There is a second less definable target audience and that is the wider Methodist church. It is the hope of the author that through on-going discussions there will be within Methodism an appreciation that God is doing something new. No longer need the church be so dependent on its clergy. The church is the people of God and the need to empower, encourage, resource, and facilitate the ministry of the whole people is vital. This is a return to biblical ideas of the church and a return to the historical basis of Methodism. It is acknowledged that this aspect of the project will be more difficult to access in terms of change. At the conclusion of this paper, reference will be made to changes that have happened since the start of this project.

Key Theological Conclusions

The fundamental basis of this project is mission of the people of God. The church is a human organisation, having to manage its resources of buildings, finance, and human resources. It has to obey the civil laws of the United Kingdom and follow correct procedures as required under law, safeguarding, personal data control, charity law, employment law, financial management, etc. As Methodist churches, the circuit churches are required to follow Methodist procedures as set down in “Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church.”¹ This lays down in 1,157 Standing Orders the

procedures to be followed by Conference, districts, circuits, and churches plus those
required of ministers. Keeping in line with all these requirements is important, but this is
maintenance; they are means to an end not the end itself. This is often described
colloquially as keeping the show on the road. The Bible says nothing about this. The
prophet Isaiah condemned the hypocrisy of his day: “The Lord says, ‘These people come
near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from
me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’” (Isa. 29:13). Jesus
quoted this in his condemnation of the religious leaders of the time (Matt. 15:8–9).

The Bible describes the church as the Body of Christ (Rom. 7:4), Bride of Christ
(Rev. 21:2, 9), the Flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2), the Household of Faith (Gal. 6:10), Royal
Priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), and Light of the World (Matt. 5:14), among others. The early
church devoted themselves to “apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of
bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The average church council meeting is frequently
dominated by matters of money and buildings. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) is to
make disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, and not just keep a particular branch of the
church going. There needs to be a move from maintenance to mission.

There are two key theological aspects for this project—that of mission and lay
leadership. The first aspect, that of mission, is most significantly about moving from an
attractional model of mission to an incarnational one. Mission in the church has been seen
as a series of programmes to attract not-yet-Christians into a church building. In more
recent years this has developed as churches have sought to be relevant to and available to
their local communities and have opened their buildings to a wide variety of community
groups, from weight-watchers, to circle dancing, to tai chi classes, and yoga. Groups for
children have developed including baby ballet, and toddler clubs have attracted many people. Like uniformed groups such as Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, these have in the main, been unsuccessful in leading people into a faith journey. Even some of the more successful evangelistic programmes like Alpha have operated on an attraction model.

This attractional model is at variance with Jesus’ model of ministry. He did not base himself in one building and invite people to come to him. Indeed, he would move away from crowds who were being attracted to what Jesus by his miracles and healings. So, in Matthew 8:18, Jesus sees a crowd attracted by healing miracles and gives orders to cross to the other side of the lake. In Mark 1:38, Jesus leaves Capernaum where the whole town had gathered at his door and goes to nearby villages and travels throughout Galilee. Jesus exercises an incarnational model of ministry. Later Jesus organises a mission campaign (Luke 10:1–17).

To start this campaign, Jesus chooses 70 disciples and sends them out two by two. There are therefore thirty-five teams of Kingdom preachers in the territory, where “the harvest is great, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2). They are to go in advance into places where Jesus might follow. The seventy are to cure the sick and spread the same message that Jesus has been proclaiming. These disciples are not to focus on teaching in synagogues. Jesus tells them to go to people’s homes.²

The second theological development is that of lay ministries. The biblical image of the church as the Body of Christ is one of every-member ministry. The World Council of Churches affirmed, “Ministry is the witness and service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church. Whilst ‘ministry’ or ‘ministries’ can also refer to the particular institutional forms which

this service takes, ministry is fundamentally about the participation of the whole Church in the life of Christ.” The 2018 Methodist Conference affirmed, “All members of the Church are called to confess their faith and to give account of their hope. They are to identify with the joys and sufferings of all people as they seek to witness in caring love. The members of Christ’s body are to struggle with the oppressed towards that freedom and dignity promised with the coming of the Kingdom.” The early Methodist Church was in many ways a lay-lead movement. John Wesley’s system of Class Meetings means that every member of a Methodist Church was accountable every week for his Christian life and spoke about faith every week. The system of lay preachers where two out of every three Methodist services are led by lay people is a development of this. This is not about removing ordained ministers from the church but of developing the ministry of lay people. The Methodist Deed of Union acknowledges the role of ordained and lay people:

Christ’s ministers in the Church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of His flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have principal and directing part in these great duties but they have no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord’s people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the Gospel and the care of souls. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.4

While for some, the shortage of Methodist ministers could mean that there is no

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choice but to turn to lay people, this paper sees the need for lay ministry as of the Holy Spirit. The Church of England has seen a similar leading of the Spirit. The same report from their Resource Strategy and Development Unit came to several conclusions. One was of the need for “The rapid development of lay ministries and a continued commitment to an ordained and lay ministry which serves the whole church both geographically and in terms of church tradition.”\(^5\) The Church of England has for some time had licensed lay ministers, known as Readers, who offer an unpaid voluntary ministry alongside the clergy. The Church of England is now developing Authorised Lay Ministry which further enables and affirms this:

Many people want to offer their time and talents in particular ways, and this scheme offers them a short but focussed Diocesan training course, to equip them for specific roles in their parishes. It encourages local diversity. [In this] Ordained ministry, licensed lay ministry and authorised lay ministry all work together to support the shared witness and service of all who are called into Christ’s fellowship.\(^6\)

Sadly, the Methodist Church has been slow to respond nationally.

These twin aspects of mission and lay leadership must result in a changed structure, a commitment to the local community for each church and the release of resources. In terms of the circuit structure this has implications for several matters. It

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implies that the ministers need to be more focused on fewer churches. The normal approach of the church in Britain into multi-church ministry for the ministers is not the way ahead. It is not just Methodism that has been forced into multi-church ministry; the national church, the Church of England, has followed that way. “In 1960 only 17% of the Church of England’s parishes were in multi parish benefices. By 2011 this figure had risen to 71%. Amalgamations and team ministries now constitute 8,400 of the Church of England’s 12,500 parishes.”7 The ministers in the circuit need to be focused on fewer churches and ideally be part of the community they serve. It implies that the lay preachers in the circuit need to be return to becoming local preachers, which is where Methodism started. They need to serve their local churches, building relationships with both the local congregation and the community. It implies the development of lay ministries.

Preferred Future

The circuit will reduce the number of ordained ministers it employs. While there are pragmatic reasons for this—financial considerations and shortage of ministers—there is a conviction that God is calling the Methodist Church into something different. This different approach involves ministers have no more than two churches to serve, and a focussing of circuit resources on those churches that are actively seeking God in terms of mission and discipleship. It includes the recruitment, training, and supervision of lay

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assistants to focus on particular mission initiatives in particular churches. It embraces focusing the local preachers to be local to fewer churches and so build pastoral links with congregations and communities. The plan envisages some churches served by a presbyter, some by a deacon, and others by lay leaders with specific gifts for the mission and discipleship plans of that church. This group of leaders will then form a diverse circuit leadership team, open to new opportunities.

The second aspect of the preferred future concerns the wider Methodist Church, beyond the authority of the author of this paper. To change the structure of Bury Circuit is a challenge but within the authority of the leadership of that circuit. To change the thinking of the wider Methodist Church is beyond the authority of any one person. Methodism is a Connexion and Conference decisions filter down to local level where they are interpreted and applied in different ways. Encouraging re-thinking about lay leadership of the church is a longer-term project. The author of the project hopes that, through conversations at district level, with other superintendents, and in his discussions at Methodist Church House in London, a seed will be planted that grows and the thinking behind this project will be implemented in different ways and with different emphases to embrace lay leadership.

In Detail

The first stage will be an agreement among the circuit leadership team (CLT) as to the overall aim of this project. The paragraph above on preferred future will be amplified and agreed among the CLT. The document detailing the vision and purpose will then be presented to the circuit meeting. This paper, included in the appendices,
includes the need to require mission plans for each church.

In the responses from the circuit churches, as they review mission and discipleship, past present and future, a key question will be for each church to set down the resources from the circuit (in terms of staff and gifting) that they would need to enable these development plans to move ahead. Each church was encouraged to think radically, to dream the big dream and not just think of having a presbyter to lead, as had always been done. These questionnaires will then be reviewed by the CLT and decisions made about allocation of ministers, employment of lay pastors and the use of volunteer lay pastors. Specific mission and discipleship opportunities will be considered and brought into the review. The whole aim of all this is to focus on the twin aims of encouraging local mission and discipleship, to release the ministers from excessive administration, and to focus on encouraging lay leadership and the use of lay resources to see the numerical and spiritual growth of each church. In summary, each church should focus on being the Body of Christ, seeing growth in Christian discipleship, partnering with God, sharing in Jesus’ mission, led by the Holy Spirit, and not just a human institution.

The third stage will be decisions about staffing, both in the short-term and longer term. Methodist rules do not normally allow the curtailing of a minister’s invitation to the circuit and so some final longer-term plans will not be possible until ministers do move on. These decisions will then be communicated to the circuit churches. The final stage is the implementation of this. It will involve the recruitment and encouragement of lay staff and their training and deployment. This needs to be done as soon as possible so that the new structure and trained staff are in place for August 2019.
In terms of the effect on wider Methodist thinking, this can only be done through discussions at district level with the district chair and fellow superintendents, discussion and opportunities to share within the north west region and other conversations at regional and national level. There is a danger that other circuits will look to lay leadership solely on the basis of a shortage of ministers. The challenge of this project is that lay leadership is not a temporary pragmatic solution to a shortage of ministers but the direction that the Holy Spirit is leading the church. Methodism has invested too much in its ministers, been too reliant on its ministers and has neglected the gifts, talents, and commitment of its lay people. One of the strengths of Methodism is its lay leadership as shown by its commitment to lay preachers. God is calling Methodism to return to its roots and to enable its lay people to exercise their gifts. By doing so they themselves will grow spiritually as disciples of Jesus Christ.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Project Implementation

The implementation of this plan involved three major aspects.

The first decision was the over-arching design for doing something different. This involved uniting the circuit leadership team behind the need to do something different and radical, to acknowledge that the old ways of doing things in the Methodist Church including the focus on and expectations of its clergy had failed. Methodism had been in decline for over eighty years and the increased secularisation of society, the shortage of ministers, the changes from living with post-modernism, and an increasing ignorance of the Christian story meant that a different way of leading the church were needed. One of
John Wimber’s more famous quotes is “faith is spelt R-I-S-K.” A pastor spelt this out in his blog, noting, “It was an act of faith. If there is no risk, no faith is required. Without faith, miracles don’t happen. If there is no miracle, there is not real revelation of the compassion and love of God.”

This alternative model was one more focused on lay resources and leadership, the equipping of the Christian people as disciples of Jesus Christ, the encouragement of each church in their own mission focused on serving their local community in Christ’s name, instead of being clergy led and clergy dominated.

The second part of the implementation was the sharing of this new way of thinking with the fifteen local churches. This would be done by presentations and by the use of a short but challenging questionnaire. This questionnaire would be designed to facilitate each church in examining and reviewing its past and current mission and discipleship programmes, to determine successes and failures and extrapolate lessons to be so learned. The questionnaire would also help each church in investigating their local community, its demographics, and how God was calling each church to serve that community in the name of Christ. The questionnaire will also encourage churches to look to their spiritual life and the development of discipleship. The final part of the questionnaire process will be the determination of the perceived future for each church, its vision and plans for that future, and finally the resources that are needed from the circuit to facilitate the achievement under God of those plans. If God’s will is discerned through prayer, then there should be confidence of God’s provision of the resources needed to fulfil God’s mission in that community.

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The third part will then be to put all these thoughts, hopes, dreams, and fears together and for the circuit leadership team to arrive at conclusions about future staffing, leadership, and oversight. These conclusions will be time related and time limited. From this will come decisions about the future deployment and recruitment of presbyters, deacons and lay staff, both voluntary and paid. The final part, after the sharing with the circuit churches, will be the preparation of job descriptions and person specifications for these staff, and then the recruitment, training, and management of these staff.

In addition, given the aim of seeking to share and influence the wider Methodist Church to review its thinking on lay leadership with the aim of prioritising mission and discipleship, the objects of the project, the theological thinking behind it, and a reflection of becoming a mission led church, all would be shared with a wider audience at district and national level. The hope was that other circuits and the district would respond, in probably ways of different emphases to this project.

**Presentations to Circuit**

In 2017, the circuit leadership team agreed a paper for presentation to the circuit meeting and a sharing with all the circuit churches. This is included in the appendices to this paper. This paper set out several important strategic statements about the future plans. The questionnaire to be used to facilitate the planned consultation with the churches was included. The principles were a reduction in the number of ministers, a focus on mission and discipleship and community outreach, the encouragement and employment of lay leaders, and the overriding need to seek God in prayer. This paper and the questionnaire were presented to each church council.
Questionnaire

As mentioned above, a statement of the project, its needs and aspirations and a questionnaire put together by the circuit leadership team was the starting point. This can be viewed in appendix 1. This statement was presented to either the church council or leadership team of each of the fifteen churches in the circuit. This presentation was done by the superintendent but with one of the circuit stewards present at every church council. There are seven questions to be answered by the churches. These concerned the prayer life of the church, discipleship plans, the way the church viewed its community that it sought to serve, the chance to reflect theologically on its recent past mission/discipleship initiatives, the challenges being faced into the immediate future, current mission plans and finally about circuit resources that the church thinks it needed to facilitate these plans. At each church council this author stressed that this is the most important question as far as this Service is concerned.

Analysing

The questionnaires were due in to the circuit office before Easter; after Easter the circuit leadership team met to consider the replies and the way ahead. A number of issues emerged from the replies. This demonstrated that a significant amount of good ministry was going on in all the churches in the circuit. Prayer is good in many places; and not good in a few others. The process that has happened has been good to challenge and assist churches in looking ahead and this will continue to guide those churches into the future. However, some churches are probably too busy given the resources they had and so therefore need to consider what they should be stopping. In the many of the responses
there is a lack of evidence. Assertions are made but not evidenced. There is in many churches an emphasis on being attractive and not incarnational. Many churches mention financial concerns, and aging and declining congregations. Lay involvement is needed but there is also the need for lay mentoring and supervision/line management of current lay volunteers. There is a problem with a lack of clarity of resources needed.

In order to get a better summary of these questionnaires, the circuit leadership team, led by a facilitator, then decided to score each church under six headings—the score was from five to zero, five being very good and zero being non-existent. The six headings are prayer, discipleship, community/partners, risk, plan, and lay led.

An exercise to compare each response was then undertaken, the results are shown in Appendix 2. This showed the need to prioritise Bolton Road, Heaton Park, Holcombe Brook, Seedfield, Tottington, Wesley, and Whitefield. The question of creating extra roles was explored.

- Lay workers are felt to be the way forward. The Bury Circuit has already run an experiment with volunteer lay pastors—some good and some bad experiences but lessons learnt.
- The Circuit should build on its experience of utilising lay pastors.
- Downside of lay pastors is that ministers could only end up doing the administration part of the role e.g. safeguarding.
- In the Burnley Circuit, which is nearby, the lay pastor is basically minister of church, with many similar duties.

An ideal scenario of staffing was then discussed.

Bolton Road Full time Presbyter and youth/family worker
Brandlesholme  Lay worker mentored in Diaconal way
Edenfield     Lay worker with pioneering tendencies
Heaton Park   Presbyter (share with Prestwich)
Holcombe Brook  Presbyter but not Superintendent—lay worker and youth worker
Jericho       Lay worker—mentoring in Diaconal way
Prestwich     Presbyter (share with Heaton Park)
Rowlands      Lay Worker and attach school to Holcombe Brook or Seedfield
Seedfield     Presbyter and lay worker(s)—family/youth or elderly
The Bridge    Outreach worker—link with Metro Christian Centre
Tottington    Deacon and lay worker with community focus
Trinity       Community worker/lay worker—Diaconal tendencies
Wesley        Part time Presbyter and lay worker with schools’ focus
Whitefield    Pioneer presbyter and children/families’ worker

The employing of a Methodist schools’ worker was explored as a possible additional separate role. This was a real excitement. This would show a balance with four and a half presbyters, a pioneer minister, a deacon, plus several churches would have lay leaders/workers. This was then reviewed and made more realistic in terms of limited resources. Possible scenarios are presented in Appendix 3.

Events then changed. At the meeting called to discuss and agree matters, an opportunity to move ahead quicker presented itself. One of the presbyters announced that she would be seeking to curtail her appointment to Bury Circuit from August 2019. That meant that from August 2019, the circuit would be reduced to four and a half presbyters, its longer-term target. It could then move ahead with the sort of reorganisation outlined above. Ministers could be allocated to their new responsibilities and work put in place to
Recruit the equivalent of two full-time workers to focus on mission in communities and in schools.

**Problems Raised**

At that point a number of problems were raised. There was a doubt as to whether the circuit could in fact manage with only four and a half ministers, of which only three and the half could preside at communion. Some doubted whether the circuit could recruit and train the equivalent of two full-time lay workers in that short time scale. One of the circuit stewards, who worshipped at Seedfield Methodist Church, raised doubts about the appointment of one of the existing presbyters to be the minister there. This steward dressed his remarks in terms of the need for continuity of leadership at Seedfield but the main objection was to the particular presbyter becoming the minister at Seedfield. Others also pointed out that Methodism in the U.K. required a presbyter to be in pastoral charge of a church—it could not be a lay person or a deacon.

The minutes of the circuit leadership team in June 2018 show something of the discussion and the lack of any unanimity. The original paper said that when two ministers left, no more would be appointed but at the last meeting the feeling was that 2019 would be too soon to lose two. The options discussed were a lay worker, presbyter, or deacon. The circuit treasurer shared figures to show the financial implications of each option.

Following a discussion, the option of a lay worker was ruled out. The advantages and disadvantages of the presbyter and deacon in this appointment were discussed including church/pastoral oversight, communion provision, and outreach. One member of CLT pointed out that having agreed that each church would have three communion services per quarter, having only three and half presbyters able to preside at communion,
would be a problem. Another member though pointed out that in many circuit churches
the number of communion services per quarter was only two, a figure that the circuit had
previously agreed as the basic need. The needs to provide presbyters to preside at the
circuit communion services are not excessive and certainly not beyond the proposed
staffing of the circuit.

A vote was taken to determine whether the circuit should seek a presbyter, a
deacon or a lay worker. The results were presbyter four, deacon three, abstain two. This
does not represent unanimity, shows that some are not hearing God as God is not so
divided, and suggests that the meeting has not found God’s will. Following the decision
to go into stationing for a presbyter, the options of a probationary presbyter or part time
presbyter were discussed but both rejected. The decision was to go into stationing for an
ordained presbyter, recognising that only about half of circuits seeking a presbyter would
be able to be filled, due to the shortage of presbyters, and so the chance of Bury Circuit
being matched with a presbyter for 2019 were limited. The new circuit structure would
then be,

- Presbyter—Bolton Road and Superintendent role
- Presbyter—Seedfield and Holcombe Brook
- Presbyter—Trinity, Jericho and Wesley
- Presbyter—Heaton Park and Prestwich
- Presbyter—Whitefield (part time)
- Deacon—Tottington and Brandleholme
- Full time community outreach lay worker—Bridge, half time and Schools half
time circuit ministerial Cover—Edenfield and Rowlands but with a volunteer lay
pastor leading the church.
This result is basically that this project had not succeeded as the author of this paper had hoped. In the end, in spite of a long and detailed process and discussion, prayer and sharing, and consultation round the circuit, the significant change that was planned for was not being made. The author of this paper felt a failure. The circuit had decided to continue being led by ministers and to seek another presbyter. That then was dependent on being allocated a presbyter in the next year of stationing, starting in September 2018 for appointment from September 2019. There was some embracing of lay leadership but that was minor and confined to smaller and failing churches in the circuit.

However, with the passing of some time, and after some prayer, things were not a total failure. The possibility of a presbyter to come into the circuit for September 2019 is now in the hands of Methodist Stationing Committee, and hopefully God is working through that committee. The circuit will move ahead with the appointment of two volunteer lay pastors to lead two of the smaller churches and the circuit has agreed to the employment of a full-time outreach worker/schools’ worker.

In addition, the project is not dead as regards wider Methodism. The church is starting to grasp the need for change and the use of lay leaders. The Methodist Church’s website now lists resources available for lay pastors. The Learning Network that supports in training Methodists in north west England now employs someone whose task is specifically to train lay pastors. Cliff College, the Methodist Church’s lay training centre now offers courses for lay pastors. The district now employs a mission and ministry co-ordinator whose task is to facilitate the use of lay resources across the district in mission, ministry and discipleship projects. Another circuit has picked up this thinking and has produced a job description for a full-time lay pastor to lead the Methodist
churches in Kendal. The discussion paper presented by the General Secretary of the Methodist Church to Conference 2018 affirmed the need for a Connexional Vocations and Ministry Strategy,

This should lead to growth in the number, variety and breath of vocations allowing for a coherent and Connexional approach to developing patterns of ministry for the whole people of God. It will ensure that there are sufficient ministers and lay leadership with the required gifts and qualities who are effectively deployed, and to support these people in their calling, development, ministry and retirement.⁹

Within Bury Circuit, continuity of preaching is starting to be embraced with churches and some preachers welcoming continuity. Some of the Bury churches are also seeing opportunities in leading their own worship. Over the summer in particular there is a shortage of preachers to lead the services across the circuit. These gaps in the preaching plan where no preacher is available are filled by requiring the local church into ‘own arrangements.’ some churches and their leaders have panicked over this and felt inadequate in leading such services. However, having been forced into these own arrangements, many of the circuit churches have experienced great blessing from doing it themselves. People have emerged from the congregation with gifts in leading services.

Attendance is usually higher as more people are involved and some churches have now set up a team of lay people to lead these services on an on-going basis and are actively seeking to have such services planned even if a preacher could be available.

There is general agreement among ministers in the district that lay leadership is the way to go. The district chair, in his calling notice for the District Synod in Autumn 2018 wrote, “we are moving toward a more mixed economy in terms of the provision of ministry. And now, perhaps more than ever, we need to recapture our historical heritage of strong lay leadership.” Bury Circuit in its small way is tentatively embracing lay leadership. Job descriptions have been drawn up for two volunteer lay pastors and another one has been prepared for a paid lay pastor/schools worker. So, there is movement and there may have to be more should a presbyter not be matched with Bury. Maybe this project has been just the start of a bigger journey that will fulfil the thinking, vision, and expectation of the project.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This project was to be the culmination of the author’s active ministry within the Methodist Church before retirement in 2019 after thirty-one years as a Methodist minister, having served in Sheffield, Derby, Hong Kong, and finally Bury. This was the opportunity to bring together the learning and experience of ministry and to establish the Bury Circuit and its fifteen churches in a structure that would focus on local mission, discipleship, and spiritual growth among its people, and prioritise lay leadership rather than a focus on the clergy and their leadership.

Through the author’s seven-year ministry in Bury, he has sought to encourage churches into a reality of awareness of the situation of a decline in numbers and influence of the church in Britain. The author has led the circuit to realise that the church exists in a post-Christendom, post-modern, and a multi-faith environment. No longer is Britain Christian in the way it thought of itself. No longer is church on Sunday the only activity available. No longer will the church attract people into buildings by attractive programmes. No longer do most people care what the church thinks on secular matters. This has been shown very clearly in Ireland where the Roman Catholic Church has lost its influence as the country becomes more secular and following the scandal of clergy abuse of children.
During these seven years the author has required churches to produce mission plans, has sought to focus resources on those churches that are responding to what God is doing, has developed prayer and leadership in the churches, and encouraged discipleship. This project was the culmination of those ideas in that it would establish the circuit and the churches with a concentration of the limited resources on those churches that were actively seeking and responding and partnering with God in their community.

There were a number of specific reasons for this project. Pragmatically something had to be done given the shortage of Methodist ministers in the U.K., the number of churches still to be served in ministry, and the need to not follow normal Methodist practices of spreading ministerial time and effort over an increasing number of churches. There was, though, a very good theological reason, as hopefully this paper shows. The Bible does not recognise solitary professional clerical-only ministry. The ministry is to be by the people of God. It is not that the church employs professionals to do the work while the contribution of the people is at best finance and encouragement, at worse criticism and an inactive audience attitude.

The plans were thought through, agreed at all stages. The process involved initially the ministers, then the circuit leadership team and circuit meeting, and then each church council and church leadership team. Each church worked through the questionnaire that was prepared concerning prayer, past mission and discipleship efforts, a review of lessons to be learned from both successes and failures, a commitment to serving the local community in the name of Christ to share God’s love and witness to the Gospel, and a plan for the future. Part of the future thinking was the question of what resources each church considered that was needed from the circuit in order to progress
those ideas. Those resources do not have to be a minister. Ministers in many ways are
generalists, knowing a little about many things. In some churches needed a specialist. So,
for example if a church felt that God’s focus was in youth work, then a youth pastor
would be a better leader than a presbyter. If the way ahead was believed to be starting
Messy Church, then again, a lay person with Messy Church experience would be the right
appointment and not a presbyter who might have very little such experience. At key
stages of the process a facilitator was used from outside the circuit to guide and challenge
the discussions. Conclusions about the way ahead were agreed by the circuit leadership
team. Alongside all the efforts locally in Bury, there was the desire to share with a wider
audience within Methodism, to challenge the Methodist district and other circuits in the
district and to input into the national thinking about the direction God was leading the
Methodist Church.

During the implementation, thinking went in a different direction. Although a
final plan was sought, an interim one would be needed until the circuit was down to the
number of ministers it believed was right for the longer term. The opportunity to move to
that final plan was presented to the circuit when one presbyter decided to curtail her
appointment to the circuit. With the benefit of hindsight, the decision of that one
presbyter to leave the circuit early was the deciding factor in the unravelling of the
project as originally envisaged. While it could have released the circuit into the bold
reorganisation early, it proved a stumbling block to some of the circuit leadership team.
With her departure and that of the current superintendent, the number of ministers was
reduced to what was being sought ultimately. At that point, the circuit leadership team
was divided, things became heated, and the agreed plan was shelved. CLT decided
against such a significant sudden reduction in the number of ministers as the circuit was not ready. The narrow majority for caution won the decision. The circuit would not reduce by two ministers but by just one. That meant that the circuit would enter the Methodist stationing system in Autumn 2018 to seek a presbyter, knowing that there was no certainty that one would be appointed. A presbyter was to be sought rather than a deacon, whose appointment would be more certain. This was on the basis that a presbyter, someone who could preside at communion and be in pastoral charge, was more important than someone with community outreach training, a deacon. The idea of lay leadership was accepted but only for two smaller churches that may not survive and another larger church that was in serious financial difficulties. These decisions and the way that they were formulated were a cause of dismay and sadness to the author of the paper and at least one other minister. The decisions seem, to the author of this paper, to ignore the original aims of re-structuring, ignore the stated needs and hopes of several churches, and ignore a plan that was believed to be God-inspired and Holy Spirit led. It merely reverts to the long-established ways in British Methodism that are familiar, safe but have not worked. Methodism needs to move from maintenance to mission and what has been decided is in the main a tinkering at the edges of the system and structure. However, at the same time one reason the circuit has entered stationing seems to be because of the fear that change may become a reality. Increasingly this author is realising that management of change is management of loss. It is never about what we're gaining but the loss of what is going and back to faith being a risk, a risk that is often hard to take as it means trusting in the God that is worshipped to be true to his commitment to and guidance for his people.
All, though, was not lost. There was still an agreement that no minister would serve more than two churches, and that circuit resources would be focused on the churches that were responding to changing demographics. There was a renewal of commitment to mission and discipleship and prayer. There was an acceptance of the role of lay leadership in the appointment of two volunteer lay pastors and the seeking another paid full-time lay pastor/school worker. This person would concentrate on outreach and to be chaplain in two of the Methodist schools in the circuit. In addition, the continuity of lay preachers concentrating on fewer churches and the acceptance in many churches of services arranged by their own people and led by their own people is really starting to catch on. Also, the circuit leadership team has decided to expand its numbers, from just the ministers and two circuit stewards, to welcome more lay members to serve.

Another significant benefit from this project has been the need for each church to develop its own mission plan, mindful of its community, its prayer life, and its people. Each church is in a unique situation and there cannot be one universal plan that suits all churches in every situation. Each church was committed to the process, spend significant time working things through, and finally presented a mission plan. Although the churches were very different in size and resources, every church identified its mission plan and is working through that. It will be held accountable for that plan and its achievement. At every circuit meeting a report is given on what is happening in mission and that is a source of blessing, encouragement, and thanksgiving. Churches are reclaiming a confidence in the Gospel and finding a welcome from their communities.

Maybe the greatest encouragement concerning this project has come from beyond Bury Circuit. The Methodist Church’s Learning Network has just appointed a trainer to
be responsible for training of lay pastors, other circuits are appointing lay leaders and pastors, resources now being collected to support lay pastors, the district has a mission and ministry coordinator to support and encourage lay led ministry initiatives across the district, and the chair of the district is now a firm advocate of lay leadership and ministry alongside that of the ministers, as is then Methodist Conference and its General Secretary.

The Challenges

The project, coming to its most important part of action, faced very real challenges. The first challenge concerned the requirement as laid down by the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church that every Methodist church had to have a presbyter in pastoral charge. This cut across the thinking of lay pastors and deacons in pastoral charge. A presbyter has to be in pastoral charge although almost all the functions can be delegated to others. There was a danger if there were not enough presbyters that the circuit would finish up with presbyters continuing to have leadership of too many churches, something that this project wanted to change. Part of the problem concerns communion. Under Methodist rules only the ordained presbyter can preside at communion, unless a dispensation is given at Conference. This rule is made to ensure good order at communion and not for any other theological reason. Fewer presbyters would increase the demands on the presbyteral staff for communion services.

The second challenge was about the utilisation of the existing ministers. They are employed by the circuit and their specific responsibilities are allocated by the superintendent. Not every minister is the right person for every church. Where one presbyter was invited to serve one group of churches, he/she may not be right to serve
elsewhere. There was also the argument that one particular minister had been hurt by one congregation, but supported and cared for by another. Therefore, he should not lose that supportive congregation. While there is some sympathy for that, ministers know that they are itinerant and can be moved to serve either anywhere in the circuit that the superintendent decides and moved anywhere in the country as Conference decides. The ministers are there to serve the church and yet too often the church seems to prioritise the care of its ministers.

The third challenge came from some of the leaders in the circuit. Part of the problem is that the author of this paper is due to retire in August 2019 and so will not be in leadership in September 2019 when any changes take place. It is difficult to impose a structure on the person who will be the new superintendent without her commitment and support. These changes should have been made earlier.

The fourth challenge comes from a lack of personal knowledge among most the circuit leadership of doing things differently and with lay pastors and leaders. To go this way was a risk; they had never done it that way. The existing system was known; the new thinking was not. There was a reluctance and fear to do the new thing. They did not take the risk. Change is not easy as it is a step into the unknown, but to quote the title of a book by John Ortburg, “If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.”¹

The final challenge came out of a fear that that it might be difficult to recruit and train enough lay pastors. If this was the case then, again, the burden would fall on the presbyters in the circuit. It is true that mere human beings do not know the future. The

¹ John Ortburg, “If You Want to Walk on Water, You've got to get out of the Boat” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014)
The circuit does not know whether enough lay pastors could be recruited in time for September 2019; equally the circuit does not know whether will be successful in stationing to get a new presbyter. The answer surely is that the circuit leadership seek God for his plans and then in faith believe that God will work his purpose out.

**What Could Have Been Different?**

The question must be asked about what might have been done differently. With the benefit of hindsight, there are some aspects of the plan that could be changed. The basic need was to educate the circuit leadership team into lay leadership of churches. This could have been done by visits to churches where this is already the case. It could have been done by involving the district mission and ministry coordinator to talk and demonstrate her work in other circuits in the district at encouraging lay-led mission and ministry initiatives. This would have allayed fear and hopefully shown the incoming superintendent that she had little to fear from being over-burdened by a shortage of presbyters in the circuit. One of the problems is that the author of this paper, in his seven years as superintendent, has sometimes been overwhelmed by shortages of presbyters, either due to sickness or just no one appointed.

**Wider Methodist Church**

While the project is moving ahead in Bury at a slower pace than was anticipated, there is a gathering momentum within Methodism in support of the thinking and plans behind this project. The district is increasingly taking the need for lay leadership on board. Other circuits are embracing these ideas and the appointment of the District
mission and ministry coordinator demonstrates a commitment to lay leadership and initiatives but an awareness that that is the direction the Spirit is leading the Methodist Church. Training and resources are now being made available for lay pastors and their ministry is increasingly affirmed. This project has been an important part of district thinking in this way. The Methodist Church Connexional Team are actively reviewing the future of ministry.

The author is quite clear that God is leading the Methodist Church into greater lay leadership, to return to its roots. This project has had some significance in that thinking. Bury Circuit has been fearful of embracing these ideas too much, but may have to revisit this if a presbyter is not matched with Bury in this current year. The longer-term view though is that lay leadership is the way ahead and much of this thinking will be resurrected in the non-too-distant future.
APPENDIX 1

The Methodist Church—Bury Circuit

Name of Church……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

Review of Mission & Ministry Plan

2018

The Circuit Meeting has agreed that the Bury Methodist churches need to focus resources of staff and money on mission and discipleship while supporting all churches in pastoral care and community service under God. Part of this Circuit Paper is the following,

Fundamental is the requirement for each church council to present every three years a Church Plan. This can only be done after much prayer; as Christians, we are seeking to share in the Mission of God. This plan will cover the following,

   i. Current mission and discipleship activities in the church.
   ii. Future planned mission and discipleship activities, with details and timescale.
   iii. Fresh thinking about Mission; willingness to take risks and try something new.
   iv. Resources in terms of money, and Circuit staff time and gifts needed for this plan, given that these Circuit and church resources are limited and finite.

A check list was provided of those matters that are fundamental to each review, as follows

Circuit’s agreed criteria—importance of evidence
   i. Everything underpinned by prayer.
   ii. Guiding people (inside and outside the church) on their journey to/with Christ. e.g. growth in discipleship and people coming to Christ.
   iii. Showing an understanding of who our community is and working with the community to meet needs—seeing what God is doing and joining in.
   iv. Willingness to change and embrace new ideas and take risks—e.g. new kinds of worship and/or community outreach.
   v. Willingness to review positive and negative outcomes.
To enable decisions to be taken by circuit leadership team in allocation of resources, please complete the following questions and return to Circuit Administrator by Easter 2018 (1\textsuperscript{st} April 2018).

It is important that evidence is provided to match the criteria. So, for example, when answering question 1 below it is not sufficient to say that the church prays every Sunday; every church does that.

Please answer these questions as fully as possible.

1. Describe your Church prayer initiatives and its prayer life.

2. Describe how your Church is involved in guiding people on their journey to/with Christ that leads to deepening discipleship.

3. Describe how you understand the community you serve and how you are working with God in that community.

4. How have mission initiatives developed in your church in the last 2–3 years and how have you evaluated their success or failure and what have you learned?

5. What are the most significant challenges you see the church facing in the next 2–3 years?

6. What are your mission and ministry development plans for the next 2–3 years?

7. Finally, set down what are the resources from the Circuit (in terms of Presbyters/Deacons/Lay Workers (paid or unpaid) and gifting/skills) that you would need to enable these development plans to move ahead.

Note these can be recorded on a separate paper; your complete response to all questions must be limited to no more than 3 sides of A4 with 12-point (no less) type.

Signed ……………………………………………………………………………………
Senior Steward or Church Council Secretary

Date ………………………………………………………

Return to Emma Twiss by 1\textsuperscript{st} April 2018
APPENDIX 2

Results of Analysing Questionnaires

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Discipleship</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Plans</th>
<th>Lay Led?</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jericho</td>
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<td>3+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitefield</td>
<td>4+</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This showed the need to prioritise Bolton Road, Heaton Park, Holcombe Brook, Seedfield, Tottington, Wesley, and Whitefield.
## APPENDIX 3

### Ideas of Allocation of Ministers

Taking the ideal scenario and moving to a more realistic situation with two main options shared.

**Option 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolton Road + Superintendent</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seedfield + Wesley</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaton Park + Prestwich</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity + Holcombe Brook</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitefield</td>
<td>½ Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tottington + Brандlesholme</td>
<td>Deacon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bridge, Edenfield, Jericho and Rowlands to be covered by lay workers.

(2 lay workers at 17.5 hours per week would be the suggestion)

**Option 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tottington + Brändlesholme + Holcombe Brook</td>
<td>Deacon and lay worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaton Park + Prestwich</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitefield</td>
<td>½ Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity + Jericho</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seedfield + Superintendent</td>
<td>Presbyter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton Road + Wesley + Schools</td>
<td>Presbyter and lay worker (community/new housing focus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Edenfield

Need to facilitate the joining with the Anglicans in Edenfield village but supported by a volunteer Lay Pastor
Rowlands Volunteer Lay Pastor

Bridge Local Ecumenical Partnership with Metro Christian Centre in Bury and employing a lay worker

One of the problems in doing this work was to acknowledge that there was a short-term situation to deal with, the departure of the current superintendent in August 2019 and his non-replacement when the circuit staff is reduced to five and half ministers plus the longer-term situation of when the next Minister leaves and the staff is further reduced to four and a half ministers. The superintendent therefore presented his ideas:

**From September 2019**

Presbyter 1: Bolton Road & Superintendent

Presbyter 2: Seedfield and Brarldesholme

Presbyter 3: Heaton Park & Prestwich

Presbyter 4: Wesley & Trinity & Jericho

Presbyter 5 (half time): Whitefield

Deacon: Tottington & Holcombe Brook

Half-time community outreach worker: Trinity

Half-time community outreach worker: Bridge

3/4-time schools’ worker—to cover all schools

Edenfield & Summerseat from Circuit

**Appointments to be made asap:**

Half-time community outreach worker: Trinity

Half-time community outreach worker: Bridge
**When one Presbyter leaves:**

Presbyter 1: Bolton Road & Superintendent

Presbyter 2: Seedfield and Wesley

Presbyter 3: Heaton Park & Prestwich

Presbyter 4 (half time): Whitefield

Deacon: Tottington & Holcombe Brook

Half-time community outreach worker: Trinity

Half-time community outreach worker: Bridge

1/4-time community outreach worker: Brandlesholme

3/4-time schools’ worker—to cover all schools

Edenfield, Jericho & Summerseat from Circuit
APPENDIX 4

Presentation to Circuit on Re-Structuring

Background

1. Previously: A few years ago, the Bury Circuit churches spent some time looking at the circuit, now in being for approaching six years. And we came to certain conclusions about structure, priorities and vision. The aim then was to focus on what we called ‘mission centres’ while supporting the work in other churches. To implement this thinking a number of changes were made,

1. The Circuit appointed six lay pastors to serve six churches.

2. The Methodist Churches in Radcliffe have been looking at their future; Close Methodist Church is closed and an application for a Free School has been submitted to the Government. If successful the Methodists plan to use the new facility for worship, outreach and community service, closing the existing buildings in Radcliffe.

3. Edenfield Methodist Church have sold their building and are worshipping in the Edenfield Community Centre and shared a united Covenant Service at the Parish Church in Edenfield. They are planning other united services on a regular basis.

4. The Methodist Churches in Heaton Park, Prestwich & Whitefield have held a few united services for special occasions.

5. The number of communion services offered in several churches has reduced.

While the above changes have been important, there has been no major shift in the use of resources; for many, church life has continued as before. Something more radical is required.
2. To rejoice about Within probably every Methodist church in the circuit, there are many special accounts of examples of initiatives in worship, service and mission, and moving accounts of pastoral care among our own folk and in the communities. There are so many loyal, faithful, committed and hardworking people in every church who give generously and faithfully of their time and talents for the life and work of the church. In addition to work through the churches as a circuit we are blessed with three Methodist or Methodist/CE primary schools, through which much is being done as well as in many other schools in the borough. The amount of prayer in the circuit is vital; renewed efforts in discipleship are happening as well as new initiatives on days other than Sunday. Lives are being impacted and people are coming to faith. The Holy Spirit is at work among us. In addition, within Methodism there is an increasing optimism with 25% of Methodist churches nationally now in numerical growth.

3. Matters for Concern There are a number of serious matters for concern which means that the Bury Circuit cannot just continue without change:

- The circuit has a significant deficit budget; this cannot continue indefinitely.
- The number of presbyters available in Stationing is below the number of circuits seeking ministers; this last year one third of vacancies could not be filled. This is projected to continue. This current year some one third of appointments were unfilled. This either means the Methodist Church either needs more ministers or fewer appointments. Maybe though God is calling us to something new. As leaders of the Bury Circuit, we need to plan for the likely situation that when the next presbyter leaves the circuit, he/she will not be replaced.
• In several churches, there are difficulties in terms of finance, property issues, shortage of people to hold office, and of ageing and diminishing congregations.

• There is a concern that in many of our Bury Circuit churches, we are failing to recruit younger generations into the life and leadership of the church.

• Bury Circuit has too many buildings. In Manchester and Stockport District, the last 15 years has been a decline of 37% in membership of the Methodist churches but only a decline of 15% in the number of buildings and a decline of only 11% in the number of ministers.

4. The Intention of this proposal It seems obvious that the Bury Circuit now needs to grasp the nettle and address the dilemmas that are before us. The Circuit needs to reshape our common future as a circuit while there is still the resources and strength to do so. It cannot be business as usual; that is a recipe for continued decline. There is a need to renew our life and structure in the circuit to make it fit for the challenges and opportunities in this 21st Century. There have been too many circuit papers and discussions on our future and this must not end in the same way.

One fact is incontrovertible: our dwindling place within contemporary British culture demands of us that we fashion a radical response now which bears all the hallmarks both of the Apostolic age of the early church and those characteristic of the birth of Methodism. The time for being single minded, focussed and resolute in our faith and discipleship has arrived. We are the ones upon whom the responsibility has fallen to take our rich heritage and bring it alive once more. We are about nothing less than reformation and revival.¹

The church is here to serve this present age. It is of course God who will bring growth and renewal, but God has chosen to work through his people. Much in this paper will be a reminder of the focus for the church on the Kingdom of God and our life within it. Our task is to determine together and under the Spirit a more hopeful and resilient path.

**Sharing in What God is Doing**

The Bible story starts in paradise with God present in the cool of the day with his people. Into that world that God created, that was good, came evil, and sin and so the relationship between God and his people, and the people and each other and creation was spoiled. But the Bible ends in revelation with a New Heaven and a New Earth and God is with his people. The Bible then is the story of God redeeming, saving and transforming his world. That story culminates in Jesus, his life, teaching, death and resurrection, but continues with the Spirit. Jesus does not leave us as orphans but sends another like Him, the Holy Spirit, to be with us for ever more. But how does God change the World?

The Bible’s answer to this question is the church. God’s plan is to become present to the world in and through a people, and then invite the world to join with him. How does this happen? In the simplest of terms, a group of people gather and become present to God. In our life together, we recognize God in the presence of Jesus Christ through disciplines in which he has promised ‘I am in your midst. By knowing God’s presence in Christ in this way, we are then able to recognize his presence in the world. We participate in his work in the world, and his presence becomes visible. The world then sees God’s presence among us and through us, and joins in with God. And the world is changed. This, I contend, is faithful presence. This is the church. And this is how God has chosen to change the world. But doesn’t this limit God’s presence too strongly to the church? Isn’t God already present over the whole earth? Why do we need the church to be his faithful presence in the world? Certainly God is present (and at work) in the whole world. As the psalmist declares, “Sing praises to God! . . . For God is the king of all the earth. . . . [He] reigns over the nations” (Ps 47:6—8 RSV). Time
and again, Old Testament texts declare God’s sovereign rule over the whole world. Nonetheless, he becomes uniquely present and visible in (and through) a people: first among his chosen people Israel (concretely symbolized in the temple) and then through Christ in the church, his body. Here among a group of people, his subjects, he is present and brings in his kingdom. And then, through this people, he reveals his presence elsewhere in the world. He invites the whole world to join in.2

Parable of the Sower In looking to how to respond and share in what God is doing the circuit leadership spent some time studying the parable of the sower, or maybe better called the parable of the soils (Mark 4). Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God. The seed is the same; the soil makes the difference. So,

a. All soil has potential but some it needs clearing first ever e.g. Paul experienced this when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus.

b. The seed needs water to flourish. How should the leadership of the Bury Circuit respond to having limited water—which soils should be prioritised?

c. Some plants grow in different types of soil—how does this impact our ministry?

d. You cannot always tell what the good soil is until you see the fruit.

e. The task of the church is to give people a good understanding to enable them to become deeper soil.

f. If you do not dig over soil regularly then it will become compact and useless. churches have a life cycle and many of our churches need a new vision.

2 David Fitch, Faithful Presence, Pre-publication Galleys, (Downers Grove: IVP, October 2016), 26
g. How can complacency be averted? Although God brings new life in Christ, as Christians, we have a job to do as we continue the work of Christ in our communities.

The Plan: Priorities

1. Fundamental to this document is the need to prioritise the use of resources and to prioritise on mission and discipleship.

2. The Bury Circuit needs to reduce the number of our buildings. It is readily acknowledged that if the Circuit were starting from scratch, it would not have 15 Methodist churches in our circuit. Churches need to consider sharing buildings either with nearby Methodist churches or ecumenical partners.

3. Where churches come into financial problems and cannot meet their financial obligations to either the circuit or with their buildings, they will not get financial support as previously.

4. The basis of circuit assessment will be revisited. Churches that are sitting on reserves beyond their immediate needs or mission plans will find their Assessments significantly increased. To hold significant unallocated reserves is bad use of resources and is against Charity Law.

5. Every church council will be required to submit an annual plan to the circuit leadership team. This plan will identify mission and discipleship emphases currently and planned developments for the future. The church council will also identify what input from ministers is needed to enable this to go ahead.
The Plan: In Detail

1. The circuit must plan for a reduction of the numbers of ministers available to the circuit. This is due to financial considerations in many churches and in the circuit, but also in terms of availability of ministers.

2. The circuit is open to the employment of part-time paid and trained lay pastors to service churches in place of ministers.

3. Fundamental to this is the requirement for each church council to present annually a church plan. This can only be done after much prayer; Christians are seeking to share in the Mission of God. This plan will cover the following
   b. Future planned mission and discipleship activities, with details and timescale.
   c. Resources in terms of money, and circuit staff time and gifts needed for this plan, given that these circuit and church resources are limited and finite.
   d. A check list is provided at the end of this document showing priorities that will be used.

4. The circuit leadership team, led by the superintendent and circuit stewards will then make decisions about the allocation of ministers.

5. Those churches that show good mission and discipleship plans and have evidence of these being worked through will be considered to be Mission Churches.

6. Each Minister will serve no more than two Mission Churches.

7. The circuit will then seek to employ one or more paid lay pastors who will serve the other churches. These lay pastors will be trained theologically and in Methodist disciplines and will come under the authority of the Superintendent.
8. Circuit’s agreed criteria—importance of evidence

h. Everything underpinned by prayer.

i. Community (inc. church) discipleship journey—e.g. growth in discipleship and people coming to Christ.

j. Showing and understanding of who our community is and working with the community to meet needs—seeing what God is doing.

k. Willingness to change and embrace new ideas and take risks—e.g. new kinds of worship and/or community outreach.

l. Willing to review positive and negative outcomes.

9. The basis of circuit assessments will be reviewed. It is no longer acceptable for any church to hold significant unallocated reserves that are not being put into mission and discipleship.

Evidence

Typical evidence that would show that churches were meeting criteria to receive resources were detailed below,

a. Everything undergirded in prayer

   i. Corporate prayer meetings.

   ii. Church prayer journals.

   iii. Testimony of answered prayer (expectation of answers).

   iv. Prayer being part of everything that churches do.

   v. Growth in confidence to pray.
b. Guiding people on their journey to/with Christ that leads to deepening discipleship
   i. People coming to faith.
   ii. Growth in discipleship.
   iii. Developing future leaders.
   iv. People exploring faith.
   v. Possibility of working with the generations that are missing from the local congregation.
   vi. New and growing relationships.

  c. Understanding the community and working with God and community
   i. Community mission audits (doing and developing).
   ii. Demonstrated partnership with community organisations.
   iii. People (church) going where the church is not.
   iv. Being able to pray for the community.
   v. New and growing relationships.

  d. Willingness to change and embrace new ideas
   i. Telling the story of a recent project
   ii. What have you started in the last year?
   iii. Being counter-cultural.

  e. Reflect on and evaluate churches activity—both positive and negative outcomes
   i. Risk taking.
   ii. Sharing failures and lessons learnt.
iii. Sharing positives and lessons learnt.

iv. Being able to stop things that are no longer working.

f. Cooperation with other churches and the wider circuit

   i. Sharing resources.

   ii. Supporting circuit events/initiatives and offices.

   iii. Working with other Christian communities
It is important to set down differences that exist between the British Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church (UMC) in the United States. UMC thinking about the ordained ministry is summed up by Ted Campbell:

Within the fellowship of the church there are many ‘varieties of gifts’ (1 Cor. 12:4) and many functions and offices. The AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church) declaration on ‘Apostolic Succession’ states that ‘each and every member [of the church] is a king and priest under God.’ Similarly, the United Methodist Disciplines states that all baptized Christian are ‘ministers,’ in that they all have gifts for service and ministry in the church. Some within the body of believers are ordained for particular ministries. Since the early 100s AD, Christian have typically recognized three orders of ministry: deacons, priest (or ‘presbyters’ or ‘elders’), and bishops. Methodists inherited this threefold pattern of ordained ministry from the Church of England with two nuances: Methodists prefer to call the second order ‘elders’ rather than ‘priest,’ and they regard bishops as a higher degree of elders rather than a third order of ministry. . . . Historically, Methodist deacons were persons preparing for ordained ministry as elders, and the office of deacon was simply a probationary and transitional office. The United Methodist Church has reshaped the diaconate (the office of deacon) in recent years to allow for permanent (not transitional) deacons, persons committed to ministries of love, justice and service.3

Records show that the early church did have this three-fold structure. The Didache, for example, states, “Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, gentlemen, not seekers after money, those who are truthful and proven, for they serve you in the ministry of prophets and teachers.”4 Hippolytus of

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3 Campbell, Methodist Doctrine, 66–67.

Rome (170–236AD) stated “When a presbyter is ordained, the bishop lay his hand upon his head while the other presbyters likewise touch him. When a deacon is ordained the bishop alone imposes hands on him—the deacon is not ordained to the priesthood but to serve the bishop. The presbyter has the authority only to receive the spirit, not to give the Spirit. This is why he does not ordain clerics. However, at the ordination of a presbyter he seals whereas the bishop ordains.”

The British Methodist Church does not have Bishops. Throughout the world, most national Methodist churches follow the American model and have Bishops. There are only four countries that follow the British model—the U.K., Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and Upper Myanmar. These national churches appoint a President of Conference. In U.K., the President is appointed for one year as a first among equals and then stands down to return to her/his previous role. The British Church notes in discussing ordained ministry,

All God’s people are called to servant ministry; service to God in service to the Church and the world. The ministries of presbyters and deacons are representative, each distinctively focusing, expressing and enabling the servant ministry of the whole people of God. Those who are ordained are called to represent God-in-Christ and the Church community in the world and hold the world and the Church community in Christ before God.

The British Methodist Church recognises two expressions of ordained ministry—presbyters and deacons. In UMC language, deacons are permanent deacons. The distinction is best expressed in the church’s own literature, again quoting Called to Ordained Ministry?

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5 Ibid., 202.
The differences are not rigid divisions, since both orders of ministry are representative of the whole ministry of the people of God. They have, rather, distinctive emphases:

The ministry of a presbyter:

- **Word**—including preaching, evangelism, theological and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the formal and informal sharing of faith and human experience.
- **Sacrament**—including presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially Baptism and holy communion.
- **Pastoral Responsibility**—including oversight, direction, discipline, order and pastoral care.

The ministry of a deacon:

- **Service**—including pastoral care, acts of mercy and acts of justice, and being or acting as a prophetic sign.
- **Witness**—including the formal and informal sharing of faith and human experience, teaching, proclamation in words and action, and theological and prophetic interpretation; and leading worship, which for some includes preaching.

Deacons are also members of a religious order living by a rule of life.  

As can be noted, presbyters must be preachers—every presbyter before being accepted for training must already be a Local Preacher. Presbyters are in pastoral charge of the church under the authority of the circuit superintendent. Presbyters alone preside at holy communion; deacons never preside at communion but can perform baptisms and weddings with the superintendent’s approval. The only exception to the requirement to be an ordained presbyter to preside at communion is that Methodist Conference can give dispensation for a probationary presbyter and even a local preacher to preside at holy communion where otherwise a church would be deprived of regular communion due to there being insufficient ordained presbyters to serve the churches. Part of the challenge in any reorganisation will be then provision of communion. In a situation where a circuit has

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7 Ibid.
retired willing presbyters they can be used to preside at communion, but some circuits—Bury included—has few retired presbyters. There have been occasions when a service of extended communion could be used. This is normally so that housebound members of a church can receive communion from a lay person, that bread and wine having been previously blessed in church; extended communion liturgy is not intended to be used to circumvent normal Methodist practice. Part of this project will have to be arrangements for the provision of communion.


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