



The Methodist Church in Scotland is large in geography and small in number of members. The Methodist Conference has been concerned about the decline in Methodist membership across the UK.

Following discussions at the District Synods, the District Policy Committee (made up of representatives from all the circuits in Scotland) has been thinking about this and recognised that every church in the District needs to pray and join in the conversation about what it means to be Methodists in the world today and the way ahead for Methodism in Scotland. If your church struggles with any of the following you are in good company:

- Finding new Church stewards & treasurers, circuit stewards & treasurers, safeguarding officers, property stewards...
- Age and number in congregation (missing children and families)
- The property
- The assessment and finance
- Reducing number of ministers

A number of Methodist Churches in Scotland are in this situation (as are other church traditions). The traditional churches are in decline in Scotland, the wider UK and in Western Europe (a fact reflected in the statistics for mission).

It is vital that, as a District, we acknowledge we cannot keep going as we are and recognise:

- it is not our fault, but we do have a responsibility
- God has not given up on us.

Methodists in the world today

We are followers of Jesus Christ. In the gospel we witness the journey of Jesus Christ which has AN ending for Jesus on the cross. As Jesus prepares for this end he prays in the garden of Gethsemane:

“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”
Mark 14:36

The call comes to be faithful disciples even when we are tired, and things are coming to an end. The District Policy Committee asked what it means to be Methodist in our approach to Christian discipleship.

Worship is a fundamental part of who we are and what we do and is expressed in gatherings for communal worship. Flowing from, and feeding this, we recognised in Methodism the traditions of ‘biblical engagement’ coupled with ‘social action’.

Social Action

Engagement and activities which are focused on those outside the worshipping community and which seek to respond to needs, develop relationships and build communities - places and processes where people from both inside and outside church do life together and share the things which matter to them

Biblical Engagement

Encouraging and enabling Methodists and those involved in Methodist Churches to develop an on-going engagement with scripture in a manner which is relevant, honest and life-changing.

The way ahead

Every church in the District is invited to pray together and from this ask themselves if they can:

- worship; AND
- engage in social action; AND
- engage in biblical literacy

To do this as a church means that a significant proportion of the Sunday attending congregation will be involved.

Safeguarding, Buildings, Finance etc are the things that allow us to be churches in the world today. The legal requirements must be adhered to and need to be done effectively to enable us to engage with our mission as Christian disciples in the Methodist tradition.

Recognising the challenges of being a Methodist church today the District invites each church to consider the following questions and answer them fully and truthfully:

- Does the congregation have the desire to worship, engage in social action and biblical literacy?
- Does this church have the capacity to do this?
- Are there other local churches (Methodist and other traditions) with whom we could work?
- Is our building a help or a hindrance – can it be a resource?
- How long can we keep paying the assessment and balance the books?

Next steps

Every church is invited to discuss this at church council meeting, drawing on views from across the whole church, and report back to their circuit meeting.

The circuit and District can help, if wanted, by working alongside churches. Across the District there are a number of different types of church (including those that don't have their own building), examples of social action projects and biblical engagement. Ideas and resources can be shared but we recognise the context of each local church is different and therefore each church must decide what will work best for them.

By 1st September 2019 each church should have a plan in place to either move forward or bring things to an end. Death is a reality and there is a sense of loss and sadness associated with this (Peter and the other disciples felt this very keenly after the death of Jesus). In the Christian story death is AN end but not THE end. Resurrection comes - made possible through the free giving of life and the power of love.

It may be, after due consideration, a church wishes to bring things to an end. A generous offering of resources can be used by the District to invest in new work and opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and to discover new ways of being church in the 21st century. We give thanks for the grace and generosity revealed in the self-giving of Christ that has been characterised in the Methodist people over many generations. This experience is what has drawn many and held us and in these gracious acts lie the seeds of new life.