

# 'Casting the net on the other side'

## A journey with the Methodist Church in Northampton



This booklet is given to you so that you can take part in the process of reimagining what the future might look like for the Methodist Churches in the Northampton Circuit. This will enable us to be better equipped for mission.

We invite you to work through this booklet and take your time praying and thinking about each section.

We hope it will be a useful tool to help you think through some of the issues but we also encourage you to talk to others in your church about this and use the response page at the end.

*God who sets us on a journey  
to discover, dream and grow,  
lead us as you led your people  
in the desert long ago;  
journey inward, journey  
outward,  
stir the spirit, stretch the  
mind,  
love for God and self and  
neighbour  
marks the way that Christ  
defined.*

It is important that everyone's views are heard and acknowledged.

**Spend a moment thinking** about the time(s) when you first sensed that God was important to you or was drawing you in a new direction. Everyone's journey with God is different.



**What changed in you as a result of this experience?**

**How were other people affected by the change in you?**

**Read John 21: 1-6:** *After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Sea of Galilee. This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing."*

*<sup>3-4</sup> The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.*

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?" They answered, "No."*

*<sup>6</sup> He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens."*

*They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.*



Last year all the Methodist churches in the Northampton Circuit participated in a process of gathering views and information about mission, finance, membership and property, which then became the Property and Resources Audit (PRAG) report. Early in 2020 churches were just beginning to consult with congregations about the particular circumstances and pressures which are being faced in these areas. Covid 19 has exacerbated the issues and forced us to re-evaluate what we do.

## **PRAG Report Key points:**

- *As a circuit, 57% of our members are over 70 and 77% are over 60. Only 8% of our members are 40 or under. With this age-demographic in mind, project ahead 10 years.....  
The impacts are already felt in the lack of people able to take on roles within churches & circuit.*
- *Across the circuit, many people are working incredibly hard to simply keep their churches going.*
- *Property issues cannot be considered in isolation, as they impact hugely on all areas of church life & mission, but we must challenge spending large amounts of money on old buildings which are no longer fit for purpose.*
- *Discussion with churches regarding the future was the least productive, with a lack of clear vision for the future, and limited evidence of an engagement with the reality of the next ten years even in 2019.*

*(Please ask your Church steward or the Circuit Office if you wish to see a full copy of the PRAG report and a summary of the Circuit finances. This information is also available on the Circuit Website)*

We can't go back to doing what we were doing before which is what Jesus' disciples tried to do when they returned to fishing.

Jesus came along and told the disciples to throw their net out on the other side - which made no sense; it was an act of faith (they hadn't recognised him at this point!). They did what he said. It worked. They were successful. Then they knew it was Jesus.

We are being forced to 'throw our net out on the other side', trusting Jesus, even if we can't always see him at work in the current circumstances.



**What is it about being involved with the Methodist church that you value most?**

**When have you taken a step of faith?**

**A challenge:** Of course our Christian Faith (and Methodist membership) means more than worshipping together for an hour on Sunday. In this last year particularly many of us have been forced to think about what it means to be church and what our personal relationship with God means when this time together is not there.

*Exploration brings new insights,  
changes, choices we must face;  
give us wisdom in deciding,  
mindful always of your grace;  
should we stumble, lose our bearings,  
find it hard to know what's right,  
we regain our true direction  
focused on the Jesus light.*

**Looking forward:** As our membership ticket reminds us: The Methodist Church exists to *'respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to*

*live out its discipleship in worship and mission'*. Mission conjures up all sorts of pictures in our minds but at its core is the desire to share the personal relationship we have with God through Jesus with others – a sense that here is a relationship that is not just for me. A sense that this relationship with God affects the way I work, play, learn, speak, listen; and this naturally shines out to others through all I do.

The PRAG report identified the need to change and develop a fresh focus on mission. However, the report also highlighted the fact that many local leaders are tired and the work of 'keeping buildings going' prevents that all important focus on mission from happening.



**Does the local Methodist Church you are a part of provide a lifeline or hold you back from growing your faith?**

**When you think of 'church', do you think of the people or the building or both?**

**A mission focused Circuit:** If our primary aim is to be churches with a focus on mission then all the resources we have, such as buildings, finances, people, structure and administration, need to be utilised and developed in such a way that they are outgoing and outward facing.



In order to be a more mission focused Circuit we are trying to look realistically at the church communities that meet within existing buildings and locations. Prominent in our thinking also needs to be ways in which the Circuit can reach out to new-build areas. In order to do this we have looked at a number of possible models for re-grouping churches and reimagining the Circuit with openness to what other ideas you might have.

*End our longing for the old  
days,  
grant the vision that we lack,  
once we've started on this  
journey  
there can be no turning back;  
let us travel light, discarding  
excess baggage from our past,  
cherish only what's essential,  
choosing treasure that will  
last.*

### **What has happened so far?**

A circuit consultation group of two representatives from each church met together in June, July and September to consider potential responses to the PRAG report.

Three possible ways forward were looked at by this group and subsequently presented to the Circuit meeting.

It is important to stress at this stage that these three models need to be prayerfully considered but that there may also be other models or possibilities which emerge as the Holy Spirit guides us in our thinking.

## Three Possible Models:

### **Model A:**

Perhaps the most adventurous and challenging approach in which management, governance, worship and other activities are centralised.

Close all the current churches but create one central hub for a base and resource centre and focus on church plants in the new areas (using community centres, for example).

### **Model B:**

A hybrid re-imagining of the circuit embracing mission to new housing developments alongside a new Town Centre initiative. 3 buildings would close to be replaced by one in the town centre.

1. A CENTRAL Town Centre initiative bringing together Kingsley Park, Queensgrove and Park Avenue on a neutral site.
2. A NORTH-WEST grouping of Kingsthorpe, St Andrew's and Harpole churches with new housing areas at Duston, Upton, Boughton, Dallington Grange etc.
3. A SOUTHERN grouping of Towcester Road, Roade, Astcote and the resource at Wootton. New housing includes Roade, Wootton and Hunsbury.
4. In the EASTERN District the Emmanuel group of 3 congregations continues its outreach as a Local Ecumenical Project (LEP) with support and input from the Methodist Circuit where appropriate. Great Billing could be linked here.

### **Model C:**

Pairing and amalgamating of churches. 2 buildings would close.

1. Queensgrove amalgamate with Towcester Road at the TRMC site and link with/support Roade and Ascote as associated village churches.

2. Kingsley Park amalgamates with Park Avenue on the Park Avenue site and link with Billing as a satellite village church

3. Kingsthorpe & St Andrews work together in a group along with Harpole as an associated village church

4. Emmanuel – 3 congregations of Emmanuel, Boothville and Rectory Farm continue as an LEP (Local Ecumenical Project) with support and input from the Methodist Circuit, as appropriate, alongside Anglican and other Free Church presence.

Working together will:

- allow us to share resources and expertise;
- give us improved communication;
- give us greater recognition of the understanding that we are a Circuit;
- provide mutual encouragement, friendship and support for young people as well as adults across the circuit;
- reduce the load on people and the resources being spent on building management;
- enable us to put more of our energy and time into our mission of outreach & evangelism;



## **What are the challenges?**

Reimagining our current circuit will require a change of culture in the heart of our congregations to be more outward looking, not just in “survival mode”. We will:

- have to make some tough decisions about buildings for which we have an emotional attachment;
- need to work hard on giving pastoral support to all;
- have to consider ways of integrating different people into our fellowships or creating new church fellowships to embrace a wide mix of people formerly attending other church locations.

## **What happens next?**

This is where you come in!

Every church council is asked to circulate the information in this booklet to everyone in their church and to find creative ways of chatting together about the implications while being mindful that we are living through a pandemic. The Circuit Leadership Team will support churches in their discussions via small group meetings as well as at church councils and individual conversations. It is recognised that the Covid 19 regulations may limit us but we will be very proactive in making sure that the methods of communication used do not exclude anyone from offering their views.

Your response to this booklet will be gathered, with feedback from others, between December and the end of February 2021.

Feedback from all churches will be reviewed and presented to the Circuit meeting in March 2021 where the next steps will be explored.





Thank you for taking your time to read this booklet and praying for the future of the Northampton Methodist Circuit.

*When we set up camp and  
settle  
to avoid love's risk and pain,  
you disturb complacent  
comfort,  
pull the tent pegs up again;  
keep us travelling in the  
knowledge  
you are always at our side;  
give us courage for the  
journey,  
Christ our goal and Christ our  
guide.*

In the light of the findings of the PRAG report, the Circuit has to change. It is vital that we hear your views and these questions might help you in your thinking.

1. What is your response to each of the models outlined on pages 7 and 8?
2. How well does each model address the issues raised in the PRAG report?
3. How will each model enable us to reach out to the new housing areas in the town?
4. What changes would you suggest to improve each model?
5. What suggestions do you have about other ways forward for the Circuit?

Response form (Please use additional sheets if necessary)

What is your response to each of the models outlined on pages 7 and 8?
How well does each model address the issues raised in the PRAG report?
How will each model enable us to reach out to the new housing areas in the town?
What changes would you suggest to improve each model?
What suggestions do you have about other ways forward for the Circuit?

Church.....

Your Name (optional).....

Please give your responses to .....By.....

Also please feel free to contact any of the ministers if you would like to talk about the issues raised in this booklet:

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**A large print version of this booklet is available.  
Please ask if you need one.**

Booklet produced by members of the Northampton Circuit Leadership Team  
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