

Borders Mission Circuit Report on Mission Consultation with the Churches October 2019-March 2020

At the invitation of the Circuit Leadership I met with Cori Clevenger and the Circuit Vision Group to explore how we might consult with the churches of the Circuit to examine how far each church felt it was of a "missional" or "fellowship" nature. In doing this we built on the previous consultations and meetings that the circuit has held and used some material from the publication "Our Church's Future Story" (published by The Methodist Church).

The aim was to hold a gathering to talk about mission before or after a Sunday service to try to encourage an attitude of prayerful worship as we shared together about each church's hopes and dreams. As there were not quite enough Sundays to do this with every church some had to have meetings during the week. I am deeply grateful for the time and effort church officers took in arranging for these gatherings to take place. It was interesting and stimulating to spend time with the different churches.

I also express my gratitude to Cori Clevenger and Sandra Burgess who helped facilitate some of these gatherings and to Peter Taylor, Samantha Taylor and Nicola Briggs who also attended some meetings. Members of the Vision Group were also present at their own church gatherings.

Each gathering sought to define what is meant by "missional" and "fellowship" church and spent time exploring those areas of church life, mission and ministry which churches felt were very important and which they would not want to lose. They also looked at those things which they dreamed of doing. Where time permitted, we looked at some of the history of the local church. The conversation built towards each person present expressing their personal view of whether their local church was a missional church or a fellowship church. Some of those present felt they could not decide on one or the other and wanted to hold the two in tension as an expression of their own church nature.

I have listed each church separately and to give some context I have noted their church membership at October 2017 and 2018 (figures for 2019 have not yet been published) recognising that membership is not necessarily an ideal measure of the size of a church. I have then listed the number that attended the Gathering and how many felt they belonged to a missional or fellowship church (sometimes people had to leave before the end and therefore there are less "votes" than the original number present). Having had the opportunity to meet with two other members of the Vision Group towards the end of this process I have made a brief comment in relation to each church which seemed to us to describe something of the life of that church arising out of the conversation held with them. The short comment is designed to give a flavour of the discussion that day. In every church there were a great many things discussed. To make a report on these conversations in detail would mean this document would be so long it would not be read (this report is 8 sides long already). Towards the end of this report under "Recommendations" is a suggestion about how the circuit might deal with the detail of what churches have shared.

One of the challenges we may have is that we cannot be certain that those present at a Gathering will have been a representative sample of the church. The Circuit Meeting will wish to bear this mind as it reflects on the responses of the churches and as it prayerfully considers how it wishes to respond to the results of this consultation.

Statistics and Brief Comments

Circuit Membership 2017 – 628 Circuit Membership 2018 - 586

Alfreton Wesley

Membership 2017 – 42 Membership 2018 - 40
13 present at Gathering. 2 identified the church as missional and fellowship. 6 identified the church as fellowship.

There was a desire to have more ministerial support.

Birchwood

Membership 2017 – 16 Membership 2018 - 16
10 present. 0 indicated missional. 10 indicated fellowship church.
It was felt there were opportunities to connect with the community through missional and pastoral outreach in connection with the cemetery and also with the extensive grounds.

Clay Cross Central

Membership 2017 – 33 Membership 2018 - 27
10 present. 5 indicated missional church, 3 fellowship and 2 missional and fellowship combined.

Concerns were expressed at the way the focal point of the village had moved away from the church building towards where the new Tesco store was sited and that the existing building also had some property issues, not least the roots of trees that had caused cracks in the building.

Crich Wesley

Membership 2017 – 12 Membership 2018 - 10
10 present. 5 identified the church as missional, 0 as a fellowship church, 1 as a missional and fellowship church.
There were possibilities around connecting with those in rural poverty in the area.

Forest Road

Membership 2017 – 32 Membership 2018 - 27
12 present. 3 indicated missional church, 6 indicated fellowship church.

There was a desire for studies around special times of year such as Advent and Lent which were more closely linked with the Bible and a desire to explore being more creative in worship.

Grassmoor

Membership 2017 – 10 Membership 2018 - 19
11 present. 10 identified the church as missional.

There was a concern to develop links with and facilities for young people.

Huthwaite

Membership 2017 – 35 Membership 2018 - 35

15 present. 1 identified church as missional, 14 identified as missional and fellowship.

There was some frustration at not seeing more fruit when great effort has been put in.

Kirkby The Hill

Membership 2017 – 27 Membership 2018 - 27

7 present. 0 identified as missional church, 7 as fellowship.

There was concern about the size, shape and age of the building.

Kirkby Trinity

Membership 2017 – 34 Membership 2018 - 35

17 Present. 0 identified as missional church, 16 as fellowship.

Pleased with promising initiative of Brick Church. Desire that additional Fellowship meetings happen.

Newton

Membership 2017 – 23 Membership 2018 - 23

10 present 10 identified the church as both a missional and fellowship church to varying degrees.

Newton would like to build links with occupants of new houses in the village and were also clear that they felt they did not want traditionalism.

Old Tupton

Membership 2017 – 27 Membership 2018 - 26

9 present. 5 identified the church as missional, 4 as fellowship.

There was a desire for a regular fellowship meeting outside Sunday services.

Pilsley

Membership 2017 – 23 Membership 2018 - 19

11 present (including 3 youngsters). 2 identified the church as missional. 6 identified as missional and fellowship.

There was a sense of having something to offer the wider circuit in terms of styles and understanding of worship.

Pinxton Town Street

Membership 2017 – 11 Membership 2018 - 10

11 present. 0 identified mission church, 7 as fellowship.

There was some concern that ecumenical services had been lost locally and a desire to see these start once again.

Selston

Membership 2017 – 16 Membership 2018 - 16

9 present. 0 indicated missional. 9 indicated fellowship.

Building difficulties challenge the church. Concern about standards in preaching.

Skegby

Membership 2017 – 51 Membership 2018 - 45

20 present. 0 identified the church as missional. 2 identified the church as missional and fellowship, 14 identified fellowship.

A number of issues were raised about worship, including timing of services and music provision.

South Normanton Zion

Membership 2017 – 16 Membership 2018 - 13
11 present 1 identified as missional, 3 as a combination of missional and fellowship,
7 as a fellowship church.

South Normanton were concerned about finances and repair to their building.

South Wingfield

Membership
Membership 2017 – 10 Membership 2018 – 7
6 present. 0 identified the church as missional, 6 as fellowship.

Property 'red tape' was of concern.

Stonebroom

Membership 2017 – 37 Membership 2018 - 34
10 present. 8 identified the church as missional, 1 abstained, 0 as fellowship.

A strong desire to continue to build links with the community in new ways.

Sutton New Cross

LEP 56 members recorded in 2018
22 present (including several toddlers). 13 identified the church as missional, 2 as
fellowship, 1 abstained.

There was a desire to build the relationship between the two morning congregations.
The Gathering after the 11 Alive service was from the 11 Alive service although all
had been invited. How might we build more support from the Methodist Church for
this fellowship?

Sutton St John's

Membership 2017 – 93 Membership 2018 - 81
29 present. 6 indicated missional and fellowship church, 20 as fellowship church.

There was a desire to build closer links within the church with the uniformed
organisations and also to connect with the Missing Generations (20s-50s).

Swanwick

Membership 2017 – 66 Membership 2018 - 63
11 present. 0 identified church as missional, 9 as fellowship.

With those present there appeared to be a sincere and deep desire to grow
missionally.

Westhouses

Membership 2017 – 14 Membership 2018 – 13
13 present. 0 identified the church as missional. 12 as fellowship.

Links with the local school valued with a desire to build on these. Concerns about
standard of worship and preaching.

Themes and Subjects Raised in a Number of Churches Across the Circuit (Recommendations relating to these are at the end)

1. There was dissatisfaction with various aspects of worship and preaching across a majority of churches in the circuit. Concerns did not all revolve around the same areas but included standard of preaching, lack of variety in worship, worship timings, lack of partnership between Preachers and Worship Teams.
2. Evangelism Training was identified as a common area where people would appreciate support in being resourced to grow in confidence to sharing the gospel with others.
3. Some concern was expressed about rules and regulations consuming a great deal of time and energy.
4. Although only Pilsley and Crich touched on this there was some desire to be able to reach out to those in debt and poverty, particularly rural poverty.
5. There was a desire to see regular Bible Studies, Prayer and Fellowship meetings where these do not already exist and a desire to keep and build on those that already exist.
6. Some churches expressed their desire to see more young people and missing generations.

Personal Reflections

There was a wide diversity of responses to the invitation to consider whether churches were missional or fellowship churches. Some people were very clear about how they saw their church and what stage it was at. For others it was difficult to see their church leaning one way or the other and so they put down both. Whether the views expressed were analytical or aspirational in some cases may merit further conversation.

There were encouraging signs of churches desiring to be more missional but generally speaking I would suggest the churches are pre-missional with some wanting earnestly to become missional. Some of the Circuit Vision group reflected that even where churches were not missional this did not mean that individuals were not. However, at present there is little indication that there are churches making new disciples consistently over a sustained period of time.

Accepting that God can raise up any people or church if God wants to irrespective of any action we take there might still be steps we could put in place which might better position ourselves to place making new disciples at the centre of what we are about. One of these might be for us to examine ourselves within churches and Circuit and match what happens and how the Church is structured against Robert Schnase's "Five Practices of a Fruitful Congregation". These practices underpin the District Policy. The practises are Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-taking mission and service, Extravagant Hospitality. These are challenging

practices and could revolutionise the life of a church and its relationship with the communities outside.

We cannot manufacture growth, but we can position ourselves so that when the wind of the Holy Spirit blows, we are ready to catch that wind. In order to do so I suggest we need openness, flexibility, visionary thinking earthed in prayer, and a willingness to leave things behind that no longer serve the purposes of God. One of the exercises we carried out as part of this consultation was to ask churches what they had that they did not want. Most churches found this very difficult to answer. There is something within us that does not want to let things go. Maybe it is a sense of failure or bereavement, but within the purposes of God it is usual for things to go in seasons (Ecclesiastes 3). The ability to leave things behind may be crucially linked with our ability to move into the new areas God is calling us.

Being in a denomination that has suffered many decades of decline there is a danger that our expectations are of decline. Sometimes it feels like there are fewer people to take on responsibilities and less resources to put anything into action. However, our Connexional structure can help in these situations. It would be possible, for instance, for two or three individuals from several churches to offer themselves for a season of service in a church that was struggling in order to revitalise it, or for these people to come together to plant a new church. Membership numbers and worshippers are not always high in number but given we are held together in Connexion we can draw a few from a number of places to provide a greater number in a specific place. This is sacrificial but could have considerable impact.

Such an initiative could be co-ordinated and supported by the Circuit which under Standing Order 500 of our Constitutional Practice and Discipline states "The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help".

To intentionally reach out to young people or other missing generations as mentioned above would be possible but it is likely it would take a sustained use of resources and require radical change in the life of our churches.

It would appear that ministerial resources are spread thinly. The time may be right to look at more creative ways of ministry so that ministers' gifts and time are used more effectively and they do not spread themselves too thinly. We may also want to create an environment and ethos in which individuals can grow in their gifts and be used in a way that promotes consistency and continuity of mission and ministry within the Circuit. In order to do that one suggestion might be to form teams around ministers and the churches that they care for and to include in these teams Local Preachers committed to a group of churches for a season, Worship Leaders, (any other appropriate person), Church Stewards and Pastoral Visitors with the aim of them being mutually accountable and charged with enabling a group of churches to move forward with a sense of unity and direction. These teams would meet on a regular basis (maybe once every two weeks for an hour or so) and would require a high degree of commitment. It would be possible to enlarge on how this might work and the suggestion is included in the recommendations below. This would be likely to have implications for the Plan. In many ways our

structures and ways of ministering are creaking. A new way of working which is more radical may be called for if we are to serve the present age and Christ's Church.

Recommendations

1. That the Circuit develop a strategy to encourage the development of preaching and worship within the Circuit and its churches. That this strategy include addressing the Preaching Plan and its effectiveness, Continuing Local Preacher Development, and the call for people to consider worship leading and preaching.
Circuit Vision Statement: As a Circuit we will promote Christian worship of God by making worship relevant and inclusive through the power of the Spirit.
2. That the Circuit consider organising a series of initiatives and training programmes designed to encourage people in the sharing of their faith.
Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches and Individuals we will be intentional about both making and growing followers of Jesus.
3. That churches be helped to understand (perhaps through a short written document) bureaucracy that is necessary and essential to the life of the Church (eg, GDPR, Health and Safety, Employment Legislation, Safeguarding) and the way that it can be Government legislation which insists on a number of these measures. That the Circuit examines its own decision-making processes in areas such as grants and property to ensure it is as streamlined as possible.
Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches and Individuals we will ensure the safety of all people within our churches.
4. That the Circuit invites suggestions of how it might act as initiator for there to be ministry which reaches out to those in poverty and debt. Such action might include consideration of setting up a CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Centre or joining with an organisation such as the Freedom Community Project (as other churches in our District have done as well as South Normanton in this Circuit).
Circuit Vision Statement: As a Circuit we will encourage churches to transform communities by breaking down economic, geographical and spiritual boundaries / borders and challenge injustice.
5. That the Circuit review how it might make provision for regular Bible Studies, Fellowship and Prayer Meetings and other small groups where faith might be nurtured.
*Circuit Vision Statement: As a Circuit we will encourage churches to provide opportunities for continuous learning, through: Bible study, fellowship groups, prayer meetings, quiet days and retreats. We will promote growth in both social and personal spirituality.
As a Circuit we will be prayerful in all things, giving God all thanks and glory through Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit as we look for the coming Kingdom.*
6. That the Circuit Leadership Team meet with me as soon as possible for an extended meeting to hear more detailed feedback from the

conversations with the churches and so there can be prayerful consideration of how churches might best be resourced and the Circuit best shaped to serve the purposes of God.

Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches and Individuals we will use our God-given resources for the furtherance of the Kingdom and God's glory.

7. In the light of how the churches responded to whether they were "missional" or "fellowship" that the Circuit Leadership Team discuss whether specific support or ministry be given to particular churches and whether churches need more intensive accompaniment to discern their future.

Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches and Individuals we will use our God-given resources for the furtherance of the Kingdom and God's glory.

8. Given the expectation of the Connexion that every church should have a mission plan by the end of this Connexional year each minister uses the feedback from the churches as a basis to initiate or revise a mission plan with each church before the summer.

Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches, Individuals we will be intentional about both making and growing followers of Jesus.

9. That the Circuit reviews whether the mission of God might be expressed by the introduction of a worker to co-ordinate outreach to young people and missing generations and to look at how it encourages churches to cultivate an invitational and welcoming culture.

Circuit Vision Statement: As Circuit, Churches and Individuals we will use our God-given resources for the furtherance of the Kingdom and God's glory.

10. That a system of grouping churches under a team which would include a minister, local preachers, worship leaders, Church Stewards (any other appropriate people) and Pastoral Visitors be investigated with urgency and implemented.

Circuit Vision Statement: As a Circuit we will help churches to think and work collaboratively – have 'porous boundaries' – and make best use of the skills of lay and ordained ministries, developing a more flexible outlook. This will help avoid the spreading of resources too thinly and allow us to invest in areas of potential growth and distinct need.

Thank you for the opportunity to share alongside churches during these past months. It has been a privilege to do so.

I submit this report for prayerful consideration and conferring.

Rev Chris Briggs

District Mission Enabler

Nottingham and Derby Methodist District

11th March 2020