Revised and Updated 2022

The Circuit Stewards' Handbook

A guide for circuit stewards in the Methodist Church

The Methodist Church

Siblings in Christ,

My father was a circuit steward and so a significant part of my introduction to the life of the Church, and the ways of Methodism in particular, were through the lens of his ministry in that office. There were lengthy meetings in our front room about (I gathered) the complexities of a circuit merger; there were long telephone conversations which (my mother told me) were necessary if the circuit was to find the right ministers in the stationing process; there were summer evenings when my parents were out 'getting the manse ready' for the incoming minister. These things mattered – and they matter still.

When, many years later, I was told in the ordination service that "this ministry will make great demands on you and your household", I was all too aware that that is not only true of the ordained. The demands that we place on lay people who hold office, and on those close to them, are also considerable and of no office is that more true than of the circuit steward.

I was blessed in my own ministry in circuit by the circuit stewards with whom I was privileged to work. Their contribution to the leadership of the circuit, their encouragement of the churches they engaged with in periods of change and transition, their conscientious stewardship of the resources of the circuit, and (perhaps most of all) their care for my wellbeing and that of my family, are things for which I will always be grateful.

Such essential ministry cannot be reduced to a formula but its key points (both those contained in our Standing Orders and those which we learn from custom and good practice) can be helpfully articulated. This handbook does just that: it sets out the responsibilities of the circuit steward and offers guidance as to how those responsibilities can be discharged well. I hope and pray that it will be helpful in your ministry as a circuit steward but, more, I hope that that ministry will be a joy to you and an encouragement to others.

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler
Secretary of the Methodist Conference

This handbook accompanies the four-module *Induction Training for Circuit Stewards*, which is available to download from the Methodist Church website **www.methodist.org.uk/circuitstewards**

Latest Standing Orders

This *Circuit Stewards' Handbook* is a working document. The Standing Orders quoted are from the 2021 edition of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (*CPD*). *CPD* is updated every year so these may change. It is important to check the most up to date Standing Orders by viewing or downloading the most recent edition at **www.methodist.org.uk/cpd**

Please note that in this handbook, the word 'must' indicates an obligation under *CPD*, the law or both, whereas the word 'should' indicates good practice. This handbook has been checked by the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice for accuracy. This resource is not exhaustive. It must be read alongside and is not a substitute for *CPD*.

Web links

Most web links in the *Circuit Stewards' Handbook* are short-cut addresses to web pages and avoid links to specific pdfs (as these often break).

Being prepared

What is a circuit steward?

The role of circuit steward is an important one in the life of the Methodist Church. It is also a personal vocation and part of an individual's discipleship: how we respond to God's love in Christ. Discipleship is – or should be – at the root of all that we find ourselves doing in the service of the Church and the world. This includes serving as a circuit steward.

It may be that you have taken on this role because others have identified gifts and graces in you that are suited to the position. Or it could be that you simply felt compelled to offer yourself in service. Whatever way you became a circuit steward, it is hoped that as you serve others this will help your own spiritual life to flourish.

The circuit is a key structure in Methodism. It is to circuits, not churches, that presbyters and deacons are stationed. And Methodism acknowledges that it is the circuit that 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" (SO 500(1)).

Together, the circuit stewards exercise a responsibility for the more practical aspects relating to this "interconnexion" (such as property and finance), alongside a pastoral ministry to the ministers and their families. They share collective responsibility and oversight for the "spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit" (SO 531(1)), alongside the Superintendent and other ministers in their circuit.

The role of a circuit steward can be demanding. But those who have taken on this responsibility point to how rewarding and stimulating it can be as they seek to support and shape the circuit in response to the needs and challenges of its local area.

Each circuit steward has different skills and responsibilities. Combined with the skills of others, they enable the development of God's work in the circuit. With other circuit stewards, you will aim to have responsibilities towards:

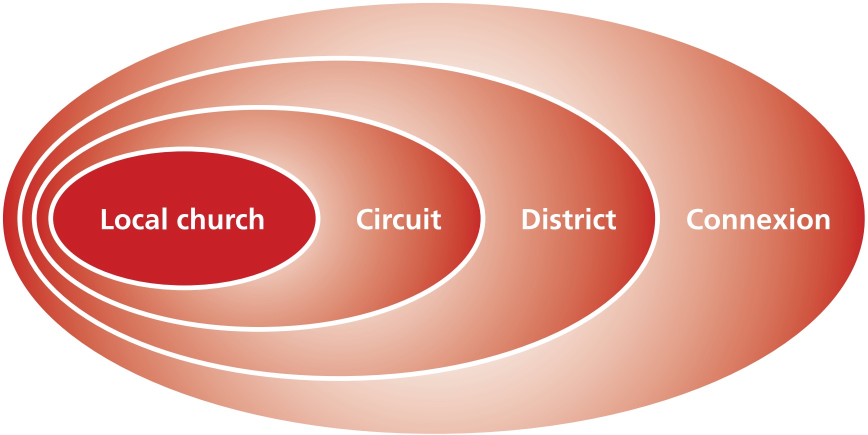
- exercising a general pastoral care for the circuit staff and their families
- meeting as a leadership team at least twice a year, before the Circuit Meeting
- keeping yourselves informed of the activities of each local church
- being aware of district and connexional policies affecting the circuit and its churches
- being sensitive to the needs of the circuit, and its officers and staff
- informing yourselves of developing movements in Methodism and the wider Church
- being alert to, and taking advice on, the legal consequences of this office and its responsibilities, eg lay employment, finance, property
- developing a vision and plan for mission within the circuit, ensuring appropriate consultation.

With your team of circuit stewards you will arrange, in a manner suitable to your circuit, how these responsibilities are exercised.

There are also specific duties relating to circuit life that circuit stewards are expected to share between them:

- finances and the circuit fund
- invitations and appointments
- manses
- meetings, eg Church Councils, Circuit Meetings and District Synods.

In order to understand fully the role of a circuit steward you also need to be clear what a circuit is and how it fits within the Connexion.



Methodist structure

Every Methodist church is in a **circuit**. Each circuit consists of a group of local churches served by local preachers and ministers, including the Superintendent.

Every circuit is in a **district**, led by a District Chair. In 2021 there are 30 districts in the Methodist Church.

Together the local churches, circuits and districts of the Methodist Church in Britain form the **Connexion**. But the Connexion is far more than a structure. It is an expression of belonging that expresses and witnesses to "a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God" (*Called to Love and Praise* (Methodist Conference, 1999), para 4.6.1).

Connexionalism is therefore a way of being Christian, in that all Christians are linked to one another, and no church, circuit or district is or can be an autonomous unit (see *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* (Methodist Conference, 2017)). This can best be seen in the Methodist Conference, which meets in a different location each summer. Members are elected from each Methodist district, along with some who are elected by the Conference, representatives of connexional and other bodies and representatives from the United Methodist Church and the Irish Methodist Conference. The Conference is a place of Christian conferring, and is the supreme decision-making body of the Church.

So as a circuit steward, although the focus of your work may be at circuit level, it is always within the context of the local church, district and the Connexion. The calling of the Church, which is relevant to all levels of Church life and first expressed by the Methodist Conference in 2000, is being reiterated today.

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.

The Church exists to:

- increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love **(Worship)**
- help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care **(Learning and Caring)**
- be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice **(Service)**
- make more followers of Jesus Christ **(Evangelism).**

(adopted by the Methodist Conference, 2000)

Preparatory reading

The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (*CPD*) is crucial for the ministry and work of circuit stewards. Volume 2 is updated annually after the Conference and contains Standing Orders relating to church and circuit life, setting out responsibilities, procedures and ways of working.

To ensure you have the most recent edition at the start of every connexional year we recommend that all circuit stewards download Volume 2 of *CPD* from **www.methodist.org.uk/cpd**. Alternatively, you can purchase the current printed edition from Methodist Publishing **www.methodistpublishing.org.uk**

As a circuit steward, there are a number of other key resources helpful for providing a good foundation. All are available on the Methodist Church website from **www.methodist.org.uk/conferencereports** where you can search by date.

- *Called to Love and Praise* (1999 Conference report)
- *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* (2017 Conference report)
- *The Missional Nature of the Circuit* (2008 Conference report)
- *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* (2005 Conference report).

Support for circuit treasurers is available at **www.methodist.org.uk/finance**

A Circuit Steward's Year

There is no such thing as a set calendar for a circuit steward as no two churches, circuits or districts function identically with their meetings or allocation of duties.

Below is a starting point for circuits to use in creating their own circuit-specific calendar (see also Appendix 3). Some may not be the direct responsibility of circuit stewards, but it is useful to be aware of them for church and circuit life.

September

- Welcome services for new presbyters, deacons and lay employees
- Induction of probationers
- Meeting of ministers and circuit stewards (eg CLT)
- Circuit Meeting
- Review accounts (general fund and benevolence fund – see SO 527(2)) for the previous connexional year and ensure these are audited
- Review policies (Safeguarding, Reserves, Health and Safety) and circuit vision/plan
- Attend Church Councils
- Attend District Synod: monitor for circuit impacts and requirements, eg Standing Order changes or sabbatical approvals
- Agree any profiles though District Policy Committee, particularly for probationers
- Prepare any reports for District Policy Committee, eg changes to worship patterns, church closures, major project consents

October

- Review stationing profiles and shortlist (see page 10 for more information)
- Attend Church Councils
- Statistics for Mission submissions
- District circuit stewards' meeting (if held)
- District Grants' Committee
- Provide input (if required) into report on any candidates for ministry from the circuit
- Review District Policy Committee outcomes
- Review and respond (if necessary) to grant application outcomes

November

- Stationing visits from prospective presbyters
- Preparation for Circuit Meeting in December (if one is being held)
- Meeting of ministers and circuit stewards (eg CLT) if there is a Circuit Meeting in December
- Property and finance schedules for circuit and churches due for completion and submission
- Prepare any reports for District Policy Committee

December

- Circuit Meeting (if one is being held)
- Stationing round two and visits from prospective presbyters
- Review District Policy Committee outcomes

January

- Matching round three and visits from prospective presbyters
- Attend Church Councils
- Provide input (if required) into report on any probationer ministers in circuit

February

- Meeting of ministers and circuit stewards (eg CLT)
- Preparation for Circuit Meeting in February/March, eg budget for next connexional year, ensuring that the budget set is supported by strategic financial planning
- Review circuit appointments and recruit circuit stewards and other roles as needed (eg circuit safeguarding officer)
- If required, prepare report for the District Probationers Committee

March

- Circuit Meeting, including appointment of Invitation Committee (SO 541) and other committees, voting on memorials to the Conference, preparing reports for and voting on application to the District Policy Committee for the authorisation of persons other than presbyters to preside at the Lord's Supper
- Ministerial Development Reviews start
- Attend Church Councils and General Church Meetings

April

- Review District Policy Committee outcomes
- Attend District Synod
- Attend stationing training, if having an invitation review
- Attend Church Councils and General Church Meetings
- Annual manse visits (suggested)

May

- Ministerial Development Reviews usually completed this month
- Invitation interviews and committee meeting
- Updates due for district and circuit directories for September
- Preparation for Circuit Meeting (if one is held in the summer)
- Meeting of ministers and circuit stewards (eg CLT) if there is a Circuit Meeting in June

June

- Circuit Meeting (if one is being held)
- Preparation for District Grants Committee
- Preparation for District Policy Committee
- Follow the Conference for decisions that impact circuit/district (note the Conference can sometimes take place in early July)
- Start work on circuit profile for stationing

July

- Check District Policy Committee and grants outcomes
- Attend Church Councils
- Farewell services and events
- If needed, prepare manses for newly arriving presbyters or deacons

August

- Complete work on circuit profile for stationing
- Order copies of *CPD* and *Minutes of Conference*
- Preparation for September Circuit Meeting

Invitations and Appointments

Each year the Stationing Committee issues a Code of Practice for everyone involved in the invitation and stationing process, available at **www.methodist.org.uk/stationingformsandguidelines**. This gives everyone, including circuit stewards, the information they will need.

Once it is available, the District Chair will organise a meeting for representatives of each circuit involved in the invitation/re-invitation process to introduce the Code of Practice. This must be read alongside Standing Orders 540-549.

Circuit stewards need to familiarise themselves with the whole process and ensure it is adhered to by the circuit and the individual churches.

The whole process of matching and/or offering an extension is a great privilege and responsibility for those involved. This involves being part of the stationing processes and is about prayerful discernment for circuits, ministers, their families and all involved. It is significant work that should be conducted as sympathetically as possible and this is best achieved by following the Code of Practice at all stages, which can be found on the Methodist website (under: Stationing forms and guidelines at **methodist.org.uk**).

The Methodist Church believes that discrimination in any form cannot be tolerated and will seek to eliminate this. The Code of Practice for those involved in invitations and appointments can be found at **www.methodist.org.uk/stationingformsandguidelines**. At its October 2019 meeting the Methodist Council directed that all members of Circuit Invitation Committees should be alerted to issues of Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and to the content of the EDI Toolkit. Particular attention is drawn to the module on ‘Unconscious Bias’ to be found at **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/stationing/unconscious-bias-training-material-for-circuit-invitation-committees/**

Remember that support is available for you within the district from the lay stationing representative or the District Chair.

Supporting Minister Wellbeing

Each minister is invited to develop a **support plan**, which is a living document that can become a covenant with the people providing support.

'Wellbeing' is a broad concept and is described as relating to the following areas in particular: "control by the individual over their day-to-day life (including over care and support provided and the way they are provided)".

The Care Act 2014 definition of Wellbeing

- This support plan is an **invitation** for them to intentionally take some time, away from crisis, to name the people/systems/disciplines which provide day-to-day support as well as where to go in an emergency situation.
- Ministers are invited to share with people what might be helpful for them to receive when they are in an emergency situation.

As Circuit Stewards, you are invited to consider:

- What enables each staff member to have an awareness of the Holy Spirit?
- What is practically useful for each staff member when times are hard?
- Is there anything we as Circuit Stewards can offer?

The Circuit Meeting

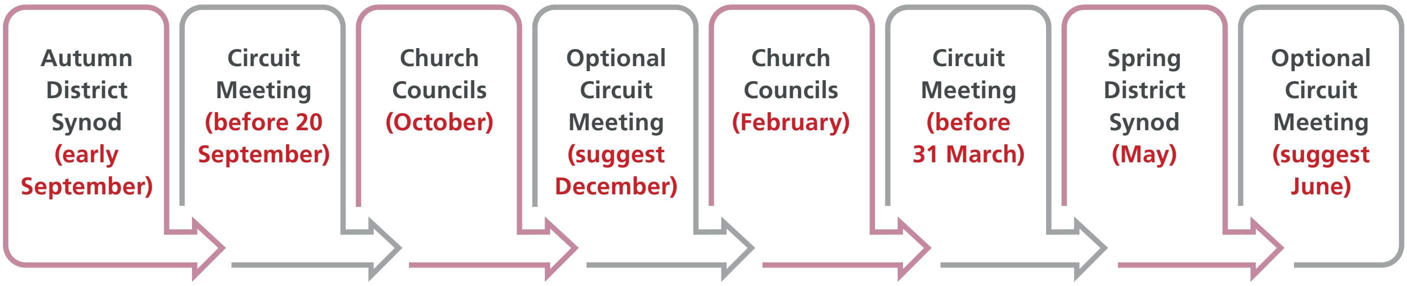
The Circuit Meeting is a focal point for the circuit (SOs 510-518). The Superintendent, who chairs the meeting, is responsible for the pattern of the meetings and setting the agenda. This includes pastoral and evangelism work, training needs, approval of those ready for admission as local preachers and the appointment (annually) of circuit stewards.

Through its policies, procedures, use of resources and decisions the meeting should nurture ministry and mission, ensuring appropriate representation from within the circuit. Members of the Circuit Meeting, including circuit stewards, are managing trustees for circuit property (normally manses) and funds. The provisions relating to managing trustees and their powers are identified in CPD Volume 2, Book II, Part 2, Model Trusts.

There must be a minimum of two Circuit Meetings per year (SO 514(1)), in September and March. Additional meetings can be held any time (for instance in December and May/June), which may allow for a more extended discussion of the life of the circuit. These also provide further opportunity for local churches to bring property approval requests.

If extra (non-emergency) meetings are needed for certain types of business, 14 days' notice is required (SO 502(7)).

To support the flow of information between the various parts of the Church ensure you follow this pattern of Circuit Meetings:



September Circuit Meeting

This must be held after the District Synod and before 20 September. This allows for invitations and extensions to be considered (SO 545, 546) and/or stationing needs to be addressed. It is unlikely that the treasurer will have the accounts audited in time for the September meeting, so they should be presented unaudited (or at the very least summarised). The auditor's report and finalised accounts will then be received at the March meeting.

March Circuit Meeting

This should meet after the February/March Church Councils and in time to send any memorials (SO 516) or the results of any voting on any deferred special resolutions of the Conference (SO 126(3) (5)) to the Conference Office. The deadline for both is 31 March.

If the audited accounts were not presented to the September meeting, then they should be presented to this meeting.

The constitution of the meeting

The Local Preachers' Meeting reports to the Circuit Meeting, whose members are responsible for acting on the advice of the Local Preachers' Meeting in recognising new Local Preachers and requesting extensions to their period on trial. This should be reviewed on a regular basis, ensuring it is sufficiently representative of "all areas of the life of the Circuit" (SO 510(1)(ix)).

Some questions for consideration:

- What "areas of the life of the Circuit" are under-represented?
- How can tokenism be avoided and genuine participation encouraged?
- What creative practice can help form a truly representative leadership for the circuit?

You may find helpful participation practice with all ages on the Methodist Church website in the Children and Youth resource *Voice Activated* at **www.methodist.org.uk/voiceactivated**

The Circuit Meeting secretary and the Superintendent must list all the members on every agenda, as this will remove any doubt as to who has a vote (SO 514(2)).

When preparing the agenda before every Circuit Meeting, the Circuit Meeting secretary and the Superintendent should also identify those members who have a conflict of interest, duty or loyalty, such as a financial interest or through membership of another trustee body (for example, the District Synod). NB. Lay members' membership of their own Local Church Council is assumed and does not need to be separately identified. (SO 514(2A)).

Temporary arrangements for online meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond

The 2021 Conference put a temporary resolution in place until 30 June 2022 enabling meetings for the general conduct of the business of the Methodist Church to be conducted electronically or in hybrid form (ie. with some participants physically present and others attending remotely) where desirable to do so for efficacy and efficiency, even after the public health restrictions on physical meetings due to the Covid-19 pandemic had been lifted. For current guidance on the business and conduct of electronic meetings please refer to the Methodist Church website, **www.methodist.org.uk**

The Circuit Meeting Agenda

The Superintendent, as the chair of the Circuit Meeting, is responsible for its agenda.

The Superintendent will determine how the meeting is run. This will probably be on a reasonably formal basis, especially if the subject matter might be controversial or many people will wish to speak and time is limited.

It is helpful for circuit stewards to have advance notice of the business of the meeting, which will follow the guidelines in *CPD* Volume 2, Book VII, part 6. Items to note for circuit stewards include:

- **Charity Commission**
  Reports required for registered charities should be as inspiring, stimulating and informative as possible. See pages 7 and 30 for more information on finance.

- **Invitation Committee**
  Agree how much authority regarding invitation responsibilities and duties should be delegated to the Invitation Committee. See page 10 for more information on invitations and appointments.

- **Annual manse inspections**
  The Circuit Meeting must receive a report of the annual manses inspection and, at least every four years, must have a fuller discussion about the longer-term strategy and condition of the manses (SO 954). See page 11 for more information on property and manses.

- **Building projects**
  Make sure that the provisions of SO 951 are followed for property projects presented to the Circuit Meeting. See page 11 for more information on property and manses. More information on property projects is available from **www.methodist.org.uk/property/projects**

- **Archives**
  Include archives annually on the agenda to remind people of the need to preserve minute books etc, and to comply with the responsibilities given under SO 015(2)-(2A).

  For retaining all records related to Safeguarding you should follow the Safeguarding Records Joint Practice Guidance for the Church of England and the Methodist Church found at **www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy**

  Current guidance on data protection must be adhered to (see page 23). Up to date information and guidance is also available on TMPC's website. With specific queries, email **dataprotection@TMPC.org.uk**

- **Minimum size of a church**
  If there are local churches that are, or may be coming, under the provisions of SO 612 (minimum size), they will need to have members of the Church Council appointed by the Circuit Meeting.

  If you have any former local churches that have become classes of other local churches under SO 612, then they must appear as an item on the Circuit Meeting agenda at least once per year in order to consider worship provision there SO 605A(8). The Circuit Meeting should also consider decisions relating to church closures, mergers or transfers of membership under SO 605A.

Sending a memorial to Conference

It is a key strength of Methodism that lay members play a major part in decision making and shaping the direction of the Church. This is done principally by submitting a memorial to the Methodist Conference.

A memorial is simply a request via a circuit or district to the Conference on any subject of connexional interest. It asks the Conference to take an action, or change a policy, or make a statement on an issue and is submitted through the following process:

1. Put your idea for a memorial to your circuit or your district
2. Circuit Meeting or District Synod votes in favour
3. Depending on your timing and where you presented your idea, the Circuit Superintendent or the Synod Secretary sends the memorial to the Memorials Secretary
4. The Memorials Committee discusses the matter and drafts a reply which it proposes to the Conference and publishes as part of the Conference Agenda.

More information about submitting memorials can be found at **www.methodist.org.uk/memorials-to-the-conference**

Circuit Leadership Teams

In order to represent the wider life of the circuit, Circuit Leadership Teams (CLT) bring together the circuit staff, both ordained and lay (including, but not exclusive to, circuit stewards). Standing Orders (SO 515(2), SO 510 (1)(ix) and SO 551) encourage such leadership to utilise a variety of gifts and skills to benefit the circuit.

Agenda

As well as discussing agenda items, a CLT meeting is an opportunity to act as a 'think tank' away from a formal agenda. Pray together and seek the work of the Holy Spirit.

Although SO 531(3)(ii) advises that ministers, probationers and circuit stewards meet before the Circuit Meeting, this should not be a rehearsal of everything that the Circuit Meeting will rightly discuss and decide. Rather, use it as an opportunity to reflect and think creatively about matters facing the circuit.

Staffing

Circuit stewards should keep at the fore conversations about future staffing needs. Consider the advantages of inviting deacons, using the gifts of supernumeraries, employing lay staff, or recruiting volunteers.

A new 'microsite' within the main Methodist Church website: *Supporting Local Ministry* **www.methodist.org.uk/supportinglocalministry** contains advice for making good, purposeful lay employee and volunteer appointments – including thinking through and assessing mission and ministry needs, and recruitment and selection good practice.

If your circuit is considering changing the number of ministers stationed to it, then remember that the District Policy Committee needs to be consulted and Synod must give permission before that decision can be implemented (SO 438).

The Warden or Deputy Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) are available to help circuits consider staffing needs. They can advise on creating or sustaining a diaconal appointment (profile).

These profiles are usually specific and the focus cannot be changed without first negotiating with the Warden of the MDO.

If your circuit involves a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), include the relevant officers of other denominations and the district ecumenical officer in your discussions.

Supervision

Ministers across the Connexion are required to be involved in a process of Reflective Supervision throughout their ministry. This is an important part of their work that allows them to reflect carefully on ministerial life for their own sake, the sake of the people they serve and the church as a whole. It enables ministers to flourish by giving them an opportunity to discuss different aspects of their work, and enables support for them in handling the more complex areas of being a minister. It involves between nine and 12 hours of dedicated time during the Connexional year, and might involve travel to and from appointments. Some ministers have been recognised as having the skills to offer supervision to others and may therefore have responsibilities placed on them by the church. Much more can be found out about supervision here: **www.methodist.org.uk/media/22023/supervision-leaflet-a5-6pp-june21.pdf**

Supporting your minister by understanding the need for supervision and praying for them regularly adds to their sense of wellbeing.

Ministerial Development Review (MDR)

Every presbyter or deacon in a circuit or district appointment, and every supernumerary minister who has entered a formal agreement with a circuit to undertake pastoral responsibility in one or more local churches, must engage in ministerial development review (SO743). Detailed guidance is offered at **www.methodist.org.uk/mdr/**. Ministers are encouraged but not obliged to share their MDR goals annually with the CLT and others.

Sabbaticals for ministers

Appropriate discussions need to take place (often at the CLT) about sabbatical arrangements. There are more details about sabbatical preparation on the Methodist Church website: **www.methodist.org.uk/sabbaticals**

Developing the circuit's mission: conversation partners

The Circuit Meeting is responsible for considering and developing the circuit's mission. Members of the Regional Learning Network (**www.methodist.org.uk/learningnetworkregions**) and district mission enablers are available to support this. There is also a Mission Planning Toolkit available on the Methodist website at **www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/leading-churches-into-growth/write-a-great-mission-plan/**

It is a good idea to invite the District Chair to participate in mission conversations on a regular basis as well.

Voluntary district officers are also useful conversation partners, and could give advice in their areas of expertise. Such officers might include advisors on disability, property, or children's and youth work.

Provide an appropriate welcome to incoming ministers

You should work alongside the Superintendent to ensure the best welcome possible for incoming ministers, including their move into a recently vacated manse (see *CPD* Volume 2, Book VII, Parts 1 and 2).

Other Meetings

Church Councils

Circuit stewards are ex-officio members of, and entitled to attend, all official meetings connected with the circuit (see SO 552) – except for Local Preachers' Meetings (unless they are a local preacher). One circuit steward must be appointed by the circuit stewards to attend each Church Council (SO 610(1)(xii)). Note that LEPs have different governance arrangements.

Circuit stewards will be able to:

- represent the circuit at the meeting
- offer information on matters relating to circuit events and circuit policy
- gather information on local church events or concerns that may need to be shared with other circuit staff or officers.

District Synod (Representative Session)

> ***"The Synod is the policy-making court of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and Connexional Team on the one hand, and the Circuits and Local Churches on the other..."***
>
> (SO 412(1))

The District Synod meets each spring and autumn. If Synod is held in your circuit then those circuit stewards will usually be part of the team responsible for its smooth running.

SO 410(1)(iv) states that one circuit steward from each circuit in the district must be a representative to the Synod. Each circuit also sends lay representatives: these will often include the other circuit stewards. All ministers stationed in the district are required to attend.

Finance and the Circuit Fund

Collectively, circuit stewards are the treasurers of the circuit fund (SO 532) and so are required to:

- collect assessments (SO 635(2)): in determining the assessment, circuits must take into account "the needs and ability to pay of each Local Church"
- provide for the stipends due to circuit staff
- pay staff expenses
- discharge any other financial claims on the circuit as agreed in the budget
- pay the circuit contribution to the Methodist Church Fund (SO 515(3)), which may be paid via the district, and the district expenses.

It is now common practice to appoint one of the circuit's stewards as 'circuit treasurer', who takes the majority of responsibility for the circuit's finances on behalf of all the circuit stewards.

Payroll

The circuit stewards must ensure that stipends and agreed allowances to meet circuit expenses are paid to ministers and other staff, including any lay employees.

- All ministers are paid through the Central Stipends Scheme that is administered by the Connexional Team.
- Lay employees' salaries can be paid locally, but this requires experience of PAYE, so many circuits now opt to use the payroll services of the Connexional Team for their lay employees.

The circuit stewards must ensure that each month the required level of funds is available in the appropriate bank or Central Finance Board (CFB) account to meet the full payroll costs, including National Insurance, pension contributions, etc.

Budget

Each year the circuit stewards must present to the Circuit Meeting a forecast budget covering a 12-month period with an indication of how the costs will be met (see Appendix 3). When assessing contributions from local churches, prior discussion with individual church treasurers is essential. Some circuits hold a meeting of treasurers, whilst other circuits approach each church treasurer on a one-to-one basis. However these discussions take place they should always be treated sensitively. The annual budget should also include those circuit projects that will require long-term financial planning.

Circuit stewards must then maintain the payment of financial obligations as set out in the annual budget, including payment to district funds and the upkeep of circuit properties (eg manses).

Annual accounts (SO 012)

The Methodist financial year is from 1 September to 31 August. Each September the annual accounts are presented to the Circuit Meeting, having been examined by the appropriate person (as defined below).

Circuits with a total income or expenditure in excess of £250,000 must prepare their accounts on an accruals basis. Where gross income is £1,000,000, or the income is over £250,000 and gross assets are over £3.26m, then a registered auditor must be appointed. An audit is concerned with gathering evidence that a true and fair view is shown in the accounts.

Circuits where gross income or total expenditure is less than £250,000 in each of the last three years can choose to have their accounts independently examined rather than audited. An independent examination must be undertaken by a registered Independent Examiner. It is a form of scrutiny that provides assurance that nothing is amiss.

Reserves

An important part of financial planning is setting an effective reserves policy for the circuit (see Standing Order 012(6)) in order to ensure effective stewardship of its financial resources. Reserves should not be allowed to accumulate or sit unused for years. There should be a clear plan for the level required and how to deploy excess reserves or how to build up insufficient levels. More detailed guidance can be downloaded from **www.methodist.org.uk/accounts**

Items for the circuit stewards/ treasurer to note

Ensure you are aware of the auditors or independent examiners used by the Church Councils in your circuit (SO 012(4)-(5)).

- Note any trust bodies within the circuit (eg large churches, projects) registered with the Charity Commission.
- If the circuit is a registered charity an annual report must be produced, showing how circuit activities are for the public benefit. The report should be given to the treasurer for each church. If this is something you have not done before, there may be experience within the circuit you can draw on. Also, the National Audit Office produces examples of good practice in annual reports that you can download from **www.nao.org.uk**, while the Directory of Social Change, **www.dsc.org.uk**, offers advice for creating better annual reports.
- If any of the local churches are running cafés or similar activities ensure they fulfil VAT requirements. If you are not sure if a church should be VAT registered, you can check the government website **www.gov.uk**, under the VAT registration section.
- Confirm that all lay employees are being paid the Living Wage in line with the Conference resolutions. This is not the same as the minimum wage nor the National Living Wage. For more information see **www.methodist.org.uk/stipends-and-lay-employment-rates**. The annual Conference report from the Connexional Allowances Committee includes an update on this area.

- You may need to be aware of pension arrangements available for lay employees. For the latest advice on pensions, see the lay employment section on the Methodist Church website at **www.methodist.org.uk/layemployment**. See also **www.tpt.org.uk** for the Pensions Trust website.
- Support, including induction training in some areas, may be available through your district office or district treasurer, or visit **www.methodist.org.uk/finance**
- The Methodist Church holds a block membership with the Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers (ACAT, **www.acat.uk.com**) for districts, circuits and churches completing accruals accounts. All other local churches can receive a copy of the ACAT newsletter through their circuit.
- Find other guidance on the web pages of the Charity Commission at **www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission** or visit **www.honorarytreasurers.org.uk** for an online forum with fellow practitioners.

Property

Manses and circuit properties

Each circuit steward has specific duties and responsibilities in relation to manses and other circuit properties (SO 533 and SO 952-954).

- Liaise regularly with ministers on the state of the manses and undertake renovations and repairs as necessary to maintain the quality of their homes. In this you need to be aware of taxation implications, as some work done on a manse when the minister is in residence can be classed as 'benefit in kind' and is taxable and has to be reported (**www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-a-to-z**). You can gain further information from Citizens Advice **www.citizensadvice.org.uk/** by searching for tax on benefits in kind. You can find more information about the Guidelines for Manses on **www.methodist.org.uk/property/manses**

- Arrange for quinquennial inspections to be carried out every five years on all circuit property (including manses and closed churches). It is suggested that a quinquennial manse inspection takes place in the early part of the final year of a minister's appointment, as this will help to inform what work needs to be carried out before a new minister begins their appointment. Ensure accredited professionals are appointed for inspections of listed buildings (further details can be found on **www.methodist.org.uk/conservation-listed-buildings/accredited-professionals**). Review the findings and recommendations of the inspectors and take any necessary action (ensuring that the necessary consents are in place beforehand). Send copies of each manse quinquennial report to the district property secretary (SOs 952-954). More information about the Quinquennial Inspection Guidance is at **www.methodist.org.uk/property/qi**

If you are new to matters relating to property the mnemonic BASICS might be helpful.

Build relationships

You are likely to work with the same tradespeople time after time, so it is worth keeping your professional relationships friendly and productive. Try to build up a few contacts, so you have someone to fall back on if your regular person cannot handle the job. If you need assistance finding a suitable tradesman, you could look on **www.maintenancebooker.org.uk/**

Act quickly

Do not be tempted to let a problem fester in order to save money. It will not go away and will probably end up costing you more.

Service regularly

Boilers and cookers need frequent servicing to keep them safe – and reduce the risk of anything going wrong. As well, electrical safety should take place every five years. There is guidance on regular maintenance inspections at **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/regular-inspections**

Invest time and money

You need to dedicate enough time to keeping the manse in good condition and be prepared to finance its upkeep. This will save the circuit expensive repair bills in the long run. If the manse is an old property then it is more likely to need increased maintenance.

Carry out inspections

You need to inspect the property regularly or arrange for it to be inspected by the manse visitors. Ministers do not always know how to carry out basic maintenance on a property, and may not tell you about problems until they leave. These regular checks will give you a good idea of the state of the property. A list of annual maintenance checks can be found on **www.methodist.org.uk/property/maintenance**. There is guidance on regular maintenance inspections at **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/regular-inspections**

Shop around

There is no point cutting corners and paying less for a shoddy job. Get a minimum of three quotes from reputable tradespeople to ensure you are getting the most cost-effective job. Follow procurement guidelines shown in Appendix 2.

- Prepare the annual property schedules, both of accounts and investments and of the state of the properties, and take any action required (SO 953).
- Be involved in matters such as the purchase, sale, extension or alteration of manses and take appropriate action in collaboration with the district property secretary and, where appropriate, the Connexional Team and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP). Further guidance can be found on **www.tmcp.org.uk/property**
- Open and maintain a log book for the retention of annual property schedules and other relevant material, and ensure that the log book is kept up to date. Establish a file for each manse in which to retain quinquennial reports, worksheets, invoices, guarantees, inspection certificates and other documents (SO 954(ix)). If a log book has not been kept, a template can be found on **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/schedules-and-forms**
- Be aware of the annual sum for manse maintenance as recommended by the District Synod.

- Present a report on the local property to the Circuit Meeting annually and after every quinquennial inspection (SO 953).

Charter for outgoing and incoming ministers

Any manse that is changing over occupancy should be ready in good time to be a place of welcome for the incoming minister. The Conference has agreed a Charter for Outgoing and Incoming Ministers, which sets out what those moving into a manse can reasonably expect. This is in *CPD* Volume 2, Book VII, Part 1. Remember, these are minimum standards. It is useful to ask: "What is the best welcome we could offer?" and then aim for that. More information can be found on **www.methodist.org.uk/property/manses**

Property matters

Property schemes requiring consent are described in Standing Order 930 and include all sales and purchases, leases and rentals, but not furnishings or the execution of non-structural repairs. To find out if consent is required, then look at the flow chart found on **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/starting-a-property-project**

However, a project may require connexional consent if any of the buildings in the circuit are listed or in conservation areas. So the advice of the Connexional Conservation Officer should be sought at the earliest opportunity. Email **conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk**, and further details can be found on **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/conservation-listed-buildings/**

Districts have full responsibility for giving consent to all property schemes and these schemes are submitted online by churches and circuits on **https://online.methodist.org.uk/login/**. Guides for using the Consents website can be found on **https://propertyconsent.methodist.org.uk/guide**. Circuit stewards are fully involved with schemes related to manses and any other circuit properties. Experience has shown that they will also frequently be involved with schemes put forward by local churches. The district property secretary and district consents panel members are available for advice and guidance on all these matters.

Support for all issues relating to property and full details of all property consents, returns and schedules can be found on the website at **www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/**. The monthly Property Matters online newsletter also offers helpful information at **www.methodist.org.uk/property/propertymatters**

Special property circumstances

The Landlord and Tenant law must be followed if a manse becomes vacant and a decision is made to retain the building with it being occupied by a paying tenant. Note that ministers are not tenants. The TMCP web pages have guidance on this subject at **www.tmcp.org.uk/property/letting-property-and-third-party-use**. You should also contact your insurer to update your policy. Please note that these lettings must be reviewed every two years and consent must be given again at that time.

If a property is empty for more than a short period, you should let your insurer know as this could affect the validity of the policy. You can find out more information about looking after empty properties on **www.methodist.org.uk/property/maintenance**. If you are in doubt about your legal obligations, contact the Church's Panel Firms (**www.tmcp.org.uk/property/panel-solicitors**). Please note that the Conference Office can provide guidance on interpretation of Standing Orders and Methodist constitutional practice, but is unable to advise individual circuits on their particular circumstances or legal obligations.

Ecclesiastical Exemption must not be used for other buildings and the guidance of the Conservation Officer should be sought in the case of any ambiguity. Please email conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk or find out more information on **www.methodist.org.uk/conservation-listed-buildings/ecclesiastical-exemption**

Safeguarding

The aim of the Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy is to create Christian communities of love and care, where good practice to promote the welfare of children, young people and adults becomes a way of life. The full policy and any updates can be found at **www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy**

It is advisable to read through the policy and note those responsible over key areas in your circuit. Make sure you know who the circuit safeguarding officer is and have a copy of their contact details.

Support is also available from your district safeguarding officer (see the district website for their details) and from the Connexional Safeguarding Team (tel: 020 7467 5189, email: **safeguarding@methodistchurch.org.uk**).

As a circuit steward, you will need to complete the Foundation Module training within six months of taking up your appointment. This promotes awareness of possible safeguarding concerns. The training equips all adults, both volunteer and paid, working in different roles in the Methodist Church to be confident in sharing safeguarding concerns with the appropriate person.

At present, circuit stewards are not required to complete the Advanced Module, but are warmly invited to do so. This training enables safeguarding officers, ministers and other leaders in churches to gain a deeper understanding of their role and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, and to develop confidence in fulfilling these.

In your role as circuit steward, it is vital you:

- promote the importance of safeguarding
- encourage those required to attend the training
- speak up about the importance of following correct procedures
- maintain good practice
- remind everyone of the value of creating safer space.

Additional Responsibilities

Decisions of the Conference

Circuit stewards need to be aware of any decisions of the Conference that impinge upon circuit life, especially any reports commended for local discussion. Some special resolutions of the Conference (SO 126(3), (5)) will be placed on the agendas of the Circuit Meeting and all Church Councils.

Each year the Conference Agenda is available on the Methodist Church website, while the Conference Business Digest, published annually after the Conference, offers a summary of the decisions made (**www.methodist.org.uk/conference**).

Pastoral care of ministers

Circuit stewards need to show pastoral support and sensitivity to individual ministers and their families. This involves meeting the ministers individually and not just collectively. It is good practice in many circuits for one or two stewards to be assigned to each minister for the year.

The circuit safe

An inventory of the documents kept in the circuit safe must be made and updated at least once a year (SO 903). These will probably include building deeds, certificates of Registration for Public Worship or Marriage, and other such legal documents. It is good practice to have a witness present when opening the safe.

District grants

If the circuit is applying for grants then complete the correct form. This must then be passed to the district secretary concerned (SO 439). The district grants officer can give details of submission dates and support offered in your district.

Copyright law

A list should be created of churches in your circuit that have licences from Christian Copyright Licensing International and/or Calamus. There are several types of licence and many churches now need a Performing Rights Licence (PRK or PCL) to allow them to show film clips, DVDs or put on live music performances. If a church has a theatre company, it will need a Local Authority Performance Licence. It is advisable to check the licensing requirements at **https://uk.ccli.com/copyright-licences/**

If churches are using printed copies of hymn books such as *Singing the Faith*, a licence is not required unless you photocopy or project the words. Visit **www/methodist.org.uk/copyright** for full details on copyright, including links to Singing the Faith+ for copyright details specific to reproducing hymns.

Data protection

Circuits need to be aware of the guidelines in relation to data protection. The Information Commissioner's Office provides a helpful summary and advice regarding the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) can be found at **www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations**

The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) website also has useful information and guidance at **www.tmcp.org.uk/about/data-protection**

Positive Working Together

Positive Working Together, an initiative of the Methodist Church, was primarily concerned with combating bullying and harassment. It has since expanded to include promoting healthy working relationships and managing conflict.

A key focus of the work is advice and regular training for District Reconciliation Groups (DRGs). DRGs provide assistance and information within districts to achieve reconciliation between people in dispute, offering support for those experiencing bullying or harassment.

However, working together positively is the job of everybody in the Church. A summary document *Positive Working Together – A Short* Guide, with other material, can help everyone play their part, available at **www.methodist.org.uk/positiveworkingtogether**

Other resources include:

- **Growing through conflict workshops**
  A one-day workshop, delivered regionally, exploring conflict and its transformation. It is recommended that circuit stewards attend this when offered. See **www.methodist.org.uk/learning** for details of what is happening in your region.
- **Positive Working Together Guidelines**
  www.methodist.org.uk/introducingpositiveworkingtogether
  These guidelines were produced to assist districts, circuits and local churches in promoting good working relationships, managing conflict and dealing with bullying and harassment within the Church. The latter often occur when issues of conflict arise and are not resolved. The guidance, therefore, provides information and resources about conflict management and the promotion of positive working.

They may also be useful for those accused of behaving in this way. The intention is to provide help with informal resolution while recognising that in some cases it is appropriate to resolve matters formally through recognised Church procedures.

- **Shared Commitments**
  www.methodist.org.uk/pwt-sharedcommitments
  A reflective half-day session for church councils or groups based on *Positive Working Together – A Short Guide*.

Visit **www.methodist.org.uk/pwt-otherresources** for a list of other relevant Methodist materials.

Visit **www.methodist.org.uk/pwt-furtherhelp** for a list of other organisations offering further support, advice and training.

Appendix 1:
Contacting the Connexional Team

Remember, the Connexional Team is available to help you.

A full list of contacts can be found at: methodist.org.uk/connexionalteam

Methodist Church House
25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR
Tel: 020 7486 5502
Email: **enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk**

Property Support
25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR
Tel: 020 7467 5271
Email: **property@methodistchurch.org.uk**

Web Applications Team (Consents & Annual Returns)
25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR
Tel: 020 7486 5502
Email: **onlinesuitesupport@methodistchurch.org.uk**

Conservation Office
(for advice on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)
Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ
Tel: 0161 235 6722
Email: **conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk**

Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes
Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ
Tel: 0161 235 6770
Web: **www.tmcp.org.uk**

Regional Learning Network
Web: **www.methodist.org.uk/learningnetworkregions**

Appendix 2: Procurement

Best practice

When making purchases for the Methodist Church, we are not spending our own money nor are we protected by consumer laws. It is recommended that you follow the Connexional Team's Procurement Policy which operates under best practice principles and adopts the following objectives:

- securing maximum value for money
- complying with all relevant legislation
- avoiding risk.

In order to do this, the Methodist Church requires that procedures and processes are in place to ensure that:

- competitive bidding and tender processes are performed
- suppliers are appropriately selected and authorised for use
- suppliers are monitored for financial and non-financial performance
- goods and services are purchased only with proper authorisation
- goods and services received are correctly recorded
- payments are only made for goods and services authorised and received.

Spend thresholds

- Below £5,000 – ideally, seek three quotations but no competitive process required for selection.
- £5,000 to £25,000 – three formal written quotations, including one from a local supplier (if a suitable supplier is available).
- £25,000 to £50,000 – a minimum of three competitive tenders, including one from a local supplier (as long as a suitable supplier is available).
- Over £50,000 – a minimum of four written competitive tenders, including one tender from a local supplier (as long as a suitable supplier is available).

General principles

Circuits should use district-negotiated contract agreements (where they exist) in order to maximise purchasing power for the whole Church and to obtain optimum value for money. When there are no district-negotiated contracts in place, circuits are encouraged to adopt the Connexional Team's Procurement Policy. All this should be agreed by the circuit meeting or circuit leadership team as appropriate.

The Connexional Team has a Procurement Manager who may be able to give guidance in exceptional cases. However, they cannot not conduct a procurement process outside the Connexional Team.

Date	Action
End of November Year 1	Request from circuit staff details of expenses to be reimbursed for the first quarter and their contribution for personal phone calls. ***(The quarterly activities need to be repeated each quarter.)***
End of May Year 1	Forms **P11D** provided by Payroll and Benefits in Financial Services, the Connexional Team, need to be completed and returned for each member of staff. These contain details of 'benefits in kind' received by staff in the financial year ending 5 April and will include relevant expenditure since 6 April in Year 0. *The Dictionary of Taxation* from Ministerial Benefits at Methodist Church House gives good advice on what to include.
August Year 1	To avoid complications with accruals in the accounts, pay all amounts due before the end of the month and bank all money received.
September Year 2	A statement of accounts should be presented to the Circuit Meeting.
October Year 2	Accounts need to be audited by a qualified auditor if income or expenditure is over £250,000; or independently examined by a suitably competent person who is not a member of the Circuit Meeting.
End of November Year 2	**The Standard Form of Accounts** should be completed, signed by the treasurer, auditor/independent examiner and Superintendent and sent to relevant circuit officer. ***(The agreed Circuit Reserves Policy must be submitted with the accounts.)***

Appendix 3:
The Methodist Financial Year

From 1 September to 31 August

The Methodist financial year runs from 1 September to 31 August. As illustrated in the table below, each financial year also requires work to be done in the preceeding and following months.

The following is a list of activities for a typical financial year (Year 0-2).

Date	Action
December Year 0	Provide figures for applications for connexional funds for Year 1.
February/ March Year 0	Set budget and assessments for Year 1 for presentation at Circuit Meeting. You will have received information on stipends, pensions and travel expenses for Year 1 and advice on tax matters. The district treasurer will have sent details of the District Assessment. Other expenses will have to be judged from previous years, bearing in mind inflation or other increases. Assessments can be set in a variety of ways. Ideally, these should not be based solely on membership but take into account such items as giving, investment income, etc, and also reflect the 'ability to pay'. The share system is used by a number of circuits where churches 'volunteer' how much they can afford to give. It is useful to receive each church's accounts and may be valuable to have a meeting of all church treasurers.
August Year 0	Church Assessments for September are officially due eight working days before the beginning of the quarter and the stipends payment is due four working days before the beginning of the quarter. It is useful to pay as many of these, if possible, by transfer through Central Finance Board or bank accounts. These transactions must be recorded in the accounts for Year 1 if accruals accounting is used (a requirement for circuits whose income or expenditure is in excess of £250,000 in a year).
September Year 1	District Assessment is due by the seventh day of the quarter, preferably by direct transfer. Other payments should be made during the year as required.

The above does not cover basic activities such as bookkeeping, record-keeping, opening bank accounts, changing signatories, reconciling bank statements, drawing up and presenting annual accounts and making the best use of resources, funds and reserves.

Circuit stewards perform the role of trustees for the circuit, with responsibilities under the Charities Act. *The Role of a Trustee in the Methodist Church* gives further information: **www.methodist.org.uk/managingtrustees**

A **Methodist** Way of Life

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.

As far as we are able, with God's help:

Worship

- We will pray daily.
- We will worship with others regularly.
- We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.

Learning and Caring

- We will care for ourselves and those around us.
- We will learn more about our faith.
- We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Service

- We will help people in our communities and beyond.
- We will care for creation and all God's gifts.
- We will challenge injustice.

Evangelism

- We will speak of the love of God.
- We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus.
- We will share our faith with others.

May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church, for the transformation of the world.

A **Methodist** Way of Life

Accountability questions

A Methodist Way of Life encourages us to grow together.
Make time to discuss these questions regularly with others.

Worship

- What is the pattern of your prayer life?
- How easy or hard do you find it to pray?
- What has spoken to you recently in worship or in the Bible?
- When, lately, have you felt close to God or distant from God?

Learning and Caring

- How have you practised generosity since we last met?
- How have you shown hospitality to others recently?
- How are you caring for yourself?
- How and what are you learning now?

Service

- How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond? What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?
- How are you caring for God's creation?
- How are you using God's gifts (including your financial resources)?
- What issues of injustice are you currently concerned about? What are you doing in response?

Evangelism

- When was the last time you were able to talk about God?
- What opportunities to share your faith have there been since we last met?
- How have you responded to opportunities to share your faith?
- Is there anyone you might invite to consider Christian faith?

How can we support each other in our Way of Life commitments?

MCCSHB22

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