

# PETERBOROUGH METHODIST CIRCUIT MISSION AUDIT\_RESOURCE

What follows is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. It is a gathering together of just a few of the pieces of literature, websites, quotes and courses that I have found inspiring and useful on my journey so far as mission enabler to the Peterborough Methodist Circuit. It is also as concise as I could make it; recognising that some people struggle with too many words (myself included), and to hopefully allow more room for the Holy Spirit to work.

Please use, or not, adapt (probably), or not, but please do prayerfully read and reflect on what our Lord Jesus might be saying to you as His followers. Followers, as individuals and Church, who are partnering with Him in God's mission to reach all people with the Gospel of Christ.

Some of these resources could, for example, form part of a Vision Day for your home church, or the basis of discussion at church council, or a fellowship group, or just be used for personal reading and reflection (although they are aimed mainly at Church, as the gathered people of Christ, reflecting together). Most important of all, of course, is to cover everything we do in prayer!

Details of books/courses and websites (bold type) are found in the appendix.

## What is Church?

"Jesus did not write a book but formed a community." (Lesslie Newbigin)

"What is at the heart of church?"

The simple answer is Jesus.

The question is not *what* is at the heart of church, but *who*?

Former Archbishop Rowan Williams described church as 'what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other' (Mission-shaped Church, CHP, 2004, p vii).

Church is what goes on when people meet Jesus, meet each other and meet Jesus in each other. Church happens when people gather regularly round Jesus."

(Fresh Expressions website)

The quotes (above) make it clear that Church is all about Jesus. Understanding what this means in reality can challenge long held ideas. There are courses available to help our understanding: **Mission Shaped Intro** – an excellent and inspiring course to help people reconnect with the communities they are called to serve and to re-imagine the forms of church that are needed for the 21st century.

If you want to explore this in more depth, there is the **Mission Shaped Ministry** course, which has a section on 'What is Church?' – Ao8. Follow the link in the appendix to find a local **MSM** course.

Church is all about community and relationships. We don't have to think too far back to remember when the local church was the hub and heart of the community. In some places it still is, but, where it isn't, it can be again.

It is about journeying with people in relationship.

"Ministry cannot be done to a community by someone who knows what they need, it can only be done with a community by someone who shares their need" – (unfortunately I can't remember where I came across this quote).

Also, remember that your home church (building) is where it is for a reason, even if it is a 'gathered church' congregation. And Jesus ministers through your Church fellowship to the local community.

Church can come in many forms and both **MSI** and **MSM** explore Fresh Expressions of Church (FxC). The definition of a FxC is: a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. (Fresh Expressions website)

The document **A Spectrum of Fresh Expressions of Church** is a concise leaflet giving 4 broad examples of how Fresh Expressions can develop. Within this leaflet you will notice '360 degree listening'. When thinking about how to discern the way forward, pray, pray and pray some more; listen to God, listen to the Church, listen to yourself. Ask, 'What would Jesus do?'. Prayer walk in your local area, getting to know people in your local community. Pay attention to every voice. So often we put God in the box of our own understanding and experience, and God is so much bigger than that. Jesus is drawing all people to Himself, and He is doing it in ways we can't even begin to second guess. But if we remain attentive to His voice, He will help us to see the world with His eyes.

**Listening for Mission** explores this in more depth.

There are two audits that accompany this document.

The first is to help to discern God's voice when you sense a call to start something – a toddler group, a senior stop, a Fresh Expression of Church.

The second is to help review ongoing ministry.

Some Fresh Expressions of Church start out as that, but others emerge from ongoing mission and outreach; for example, a course for those seeking to know more about the Christian faith might become a Seekers Church, or an after-school club where parents want to stay too might become a midweek Family Church.

The need for a toddler group or senior stop can be discerned from just getting to know people, and chatting with them.

Sometimes we need to stop one thing in order to focus on something else... what is God saying to you and/or your home church? The audits may help.

**A Fresh Expressions Journey** is a helpful diagram that shows how a Fresh Expression of Church emerges.

**Refresh** is a concise and very useful paperback book that explores 'Being Church and Doing Life'.

**How to Pioneer (even if you haven't a clue)** is another useful paperback book worth reading.

**3 Minute Guides** are a succinct exploration of FxC.

The **Share Booklets** look at FxC in more detail.

**The Pitsmoor Cycle** helps us to understand that a sense of belonging comes before believing. So often the expectation is the other way around. And 'belonging' first is at the heart of a FxC emerging.

## Discipleship

Picking up on the last point above – 'a sense of belonging comes before believing' – when we talk about discipleship we perhaps need to stretch our thinking.

In the new things God has been doing across the Peterborough Methodist Circuit is a recurrent theme:

People are drawn to an outreach/mission activity, and within that they hear more about Jesus.

They have a real sense of belonging as they are welcomed, and then they come to faith.

They are discipled before they become disciples.

Tim Nash (Venture Fx Pioneer) said: 'We should think of Fresh Expressions of Discipleship, not necessarily Fresh Expressions of Church ... discipleship and discipling leads to church, not the other way around.'

The excellent book **Making Disciples in Messy Church**, shows how it is possible for Messy Church to make disciples.

A useful course for those exploring faith in God is **Puzzling Questions**. This 6 week course uses video and discussion groups to unpack some of the big questions in life that people have; 'what is God like?', 'what happens after I die?'. These are questions that most people have. Ask God to show you the people that you could invite to a **Puzzling Questions** course.

There are lots of courses available to help people delve deeper, and explore the Christian faith in more detail. The one most people are familiar with is the Alpha course. Resources for this are readily available.

Another excellent course is **Christianity Explored**. As people make a commitment to Jesus and want to think about what it means to be His disciple there is **Discipleship Explored**. If you follow the link in the appendix you will find other useful C E Ministries resources.

At the heart of what it means to be Church – the body of Christ – is vibrant whole life discipleship. This is also the starting point for listening to God as we partner with Jesus in God's mission.

Former General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain, Martyn Atkins is the author of a challenging booklet **Discipleship and the people called Methodist**, which is worth reading and studying. It can be purchased from Methodist Publishing, or downloaded as a pdf document from the Methodist UK website, where you can also find **Deepening Discipleship**; the title speaks for itself, and **Our Calling** which looks at the calling of the Methodist Church to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ, and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

An excellent book to use as a group or individual resource is **Holy Habits** by Andrew Roberts. This book is full of Spirit inspired observation and wisdom about life as a disciple of Jesus. It has been recommended by both the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, and is very readable but challenging at the same time.

There are lots of courses that can be used in fellowship and Bible study groups.

Two that I have found useful are:

**J John's Just 10** – which looks at the 10 Commandments through 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes.

**Nooma DVDs** – these provide a particularly thought provoking and challenging exploration of what it means to follow Jesus.

Last but by no means least is **Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations** by Bishop Robert Schnase, which formed the basis of our preaching series across the circuit in the autumn of 2015.

And a quote to conclude this section:

"The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence."

(Dallas Willard)

# Evangelism

Rev Canon Dave Male is National Advisor for Pioneer Development in the Church of England. At a Centre for Pioneer Learning seminar he noted that if you say the word 'evangelism' fast enough, it can sound like 'vandalism', and that for many people that is exactly what it is. Historically, evangelism has had a bad name, however as disciples of Jesus within the Church, the body of Christ, we are called to make disciples... evangelism. Evangelism is part of 'Our Calling'.

Vibrant whole life discipleship is the starting point for evangelism.

John Stott, a noted English clergyman, in his final public address at Keswick in 2007 said...

"Incarnational evangelism or entering into other people's worlds with Christ-likeness, is essential to the church's walk in the 21st century. The most effective preaching comes from those who embody their message. What communicates now are people, not words or ideas but rather personal authenticity, that is, Christ-likeness."

A concern often voiced is that people don't want to hear about Jesus, and if we start talking about Him we will have a negative, and not a positive, effect.

**Talking Jesus** is a survey that was commissioned about this very subject and it showed that this is not the case. People are a lot more open to hear about Jesus than we might think. They are not interested in 'religion' very often, but Jesus is attractive and compelling, and the impact He has on people's lives is something that people take note of; they want to know more. Read and be encouraged.

Paying attention to our own discipleship and knowing that people are more open than we might think, to hear about Jesus, gives us a good starting point to share Him with others.

And making sharing personal testimony a natural part of our life, helps to build confidence in sharing Jesus.

There are courses that groups can work through together.

Some encourage action in the week between meetings:

**The Natural Evangelism Course** by J John

**Life on the Frontline** by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity

Evangelism is part of mission and the following are resources that have proved useful/encouraging to me at different times:

**50 ideas for mission**

**The Viral Gospel** – who is your 'person of peace'?

**Tell Show Be** – Honest and clear short video about evangelism.

**The Cinnamon Action Faith Audit 2016** – evidence of the value of the time given by UK Church and faith groups to their communities.

And a quote about mission: 'The goal of mission is to leave people positive for the next Holy Spirit encounter' – this was shared by a speaker at Spring Harvest 2017.

## Conclusion

At the heart of God's mission is transformation; of us, of those we meet, of those we don't meet, and of the world we live in. This transformation comes with reconciliation with God. For this to happen, people need to hear the Gospel message. For centuries this has been mainly through organized religion and traditional church in particular. It is clear that relying solely on traditional church to reach people with the Gospel is not appropriate. Here are some quotes from the Methodist Conference Business Digest 2017.

"In her Presidential address, the Revd Loraine N Mellor asked: "How are we disturbing the present in the church today?" as she shared her concerns for the current state of the church and her vision for taking radical risks to change its culture."

"The Conference received a report setting out a 3.5% year-on-year decline in membership over the past decade, with the number of members standing at 188,000."

But also in the same document, that can be found on the Methodist website, we read...

'The triennial statistics also revealed that engagement in local churches through cafes, clubs, alternative forms of church and other bodies reached 500,000 people each week.

Mr Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary, presenting the report said: "While it does make for a challenging read, it's important to remember that membership figures alone don't tell the whole story. Across the country, thousands of Methodist communities are impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every week in a wide variety of ways."

There have always been alternative ways of being and doing Church, and since the turn of the century, this has been increasingly recognized (with the Fresh Expressions movement in particular).

The Digest goes on to say:

"The Conference discussed the report in District workshops and adopted a Notice of Motion calling:

- Methodist members to enthusiasm in prayer and acts of personal evangelism;
- Methodist churches to direct their work and wealth to the priority of making new disciples;
- Methodist Circuits to resource the forming of new Methodist societies wherever possible, to offer witness and worship in new places, or in places where Christian presence has long since diminished;
- Methodist Districts to include disciple-making as a priority for forthcoming synods.

Two further Notices of Motion, aimed at furthering the mission of the Church, were also adopted:

- Each year, every Church Council was encouraged to address and answer the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?', with the answer to be presented to the Circuit Meeting in order to aid its wider, strategic, oversight of mission and ministry. This Notice of Motion was also referred for further consideration to the Methodist Council which will report back to the 2018 Conference.
- The Conference recognised the challenges and changes facing all communities in the UK and the urgent call on the Methodist people to share the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and action. Every local church was asked to launch the new Connexional year with a day of prayer and fasting. The Methodist Council was asked to ensure that the Connexional Team promote such a day with appropriate resources."

I have to say, that I am personally not comfortable with Church Councils being "encouraged to address and answer the question 'do you have an end of life plan?'" , but the other points encourage us to be faithful disciples of Jesus, loving God and loving people.

It will involve personal sacrifice – time, self, and resources, and a commitment to forming genuine relationships with those outside of, or on the fringes of, Sunday congregations.

We may try something new, that we feel called to start, and there may be no response or it might be short lived, but remember... there is no such thing as a failure. God will help us to learn from such experiences and move forward. Above all, don't limit God, who is always doing new things and calling us to join in!

Quoting Andrew Roberts in his book Holy Habits, 'the adventure of discipleship begins with the call of Jesus to follow'... 'the calling is personal and relational'... it 'is a call to follow the inspiring, challenging, occasionally enigmatic but above all and always, loving one, called Jesus Christ, the Son of God'... 'there is a broken world in need of healing, good news to be shared and Kingdom work to be done'...

What an awesome privilege to be a disciple of Jesus and part of God's mission!

Amen.