

What is a Circuit? Why do churches pay a 'share'? What is District? How does it all fit together?

What is Circuit?

Churches working together to support each other, enabled by a team of ministers, lay-employees, and lay volunteers. The Circuit is led by a superintendent minister who ensures that we fulfil all our obligations as a church and charity.

Why do we work as a Circuit?

Because together we are stronger - we can share resources and to together what we cannot do alone. Because working together is life-giving and fun.

Why do the churches give Circuit finance in the form of a 'share'?

No share equals no ministry; our finance goes towards funding staff, travel and communication expenses, pensions, financial services, upkeep of manses, insurance, resources for training of worship leaders and local preachers, safeguarding, HR and legal advice. Some of this is covered centrally through an additional 'District Levy'. Some is covered independently.

Factoid one: Ministers are not employees: they are office holders. They are not paid a wage but a living allowance. Initial appointments run for five years – and the decision to replace a minister needs to be taken a year before they leave. We need to plan for this financially.

Factoid two: The Circuit manages four layworker posts, carried out by three people. However, these are heavily subsidised through District grants. Of the three posts appointed recently, only one post is paid for through the circuit, our contribution amounting to eight hours a week. This role is subsidised by rental income of an empty manse. We have a track record of making our finances go further.

Factoid three: The Circuit has been running with a deficit budget to ease the burden on local churches. Currently, for every £1 we would receive in share, we would now need £1.40 to balance the budget – without resorting to reduction in ministers or the sale of buildings.

Why do we need the Circuit?

It can be difficult to see the see the riches we have from the inside. The plan, and our model of working, with ministers, supernumeraries and preachers shared across churches, guards against unhealthy leadership styles, makes the most of lay giftings, and enables a breadth of theology. We also support each other in sharing some of the costs of our joint ministry and mission.

Whilst 'big' might appear to equal 'strong', smaller churches can give proportionally more per attendee, and may offer people and skills that are not available in larger churches.

Could my church manage on its own and keep its 'share'?

No. Not if you want to be part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain! The Charity Commission recognises Methodist Churches so long as we abide by our constitution. As such, every church needs to have a minister. The first call on the finances of the church is to meet these costs - which is one component of 'the share' - and these are set by the circuit.

Churches have historically negotiated their share by what they can afford, but less share overall means less ministry and less security moving forward, and our ministerial cover is at its limits now – although this of course depends on what you want your ministers to do. There is however a basic level of support that ministers provide to churches through baptisms, weddings, funerals, pastoral care (including mentoring), and chairing of meetings etc, and to do this well is a challenge – which is why we employ additional staff.

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How can Circuit and Church work together for our future?

The Circuit listens to the needs of the churches and seeks to provide support. This may be by creating and funding new staff posts, helping churches develop their mission, drawing in other people with experience who can advise, and sourcing/supporting grant funding.

What is the District?

A group of circuits, supported by a District Chair/staff. We are part of the Northampton District.

What do Districts do?

District Chairs have a key role in providing guidance and pastoral care to ministers. They assist circuits within 'stationing' in shaping appointments and searching for ministers. Districts reports back to the Methodist Church nationally, on progress on our national priorities. It encourages circuits to focus on aspects of mission and provides professional advice and training. It has the capacity to organise large initiatives - for example, District Youth Gatherings, 3 Generate, and Love Is...

How does the District help us?

Recent examples include financial advice, an offer of a missionary to visit Elton and explore the setting up of small groups, advice/support on two live safeguarding cases, permissions required for building projects, providing supervision for a superintendent, exploring opportunities for grant funding (most recently a start-up mission grant, and assistance with GDPR.

How does our District help us financially?

Even though we pay a levy, we benefit from grant support, particularly Mainly through grant funding of new lay employees. We have experienced this for over a decade. Examples include a Deacon in Welland, a Circuit Mission Enabler, A Children's and Youth Outreach Worker, a young Social Media Enabler (this was free!), a Local Church Project Worker, and most recently a Lay Pastoral Assistant for our second presbyter. The District has also supported us in the past with grant funding for building/mission projects. This decreased in recent years (owing to external pressures) but is now more open – partly through discussions prompted by our superintendent and mission enabler.

What is the Connexion?

The Connexion (not a mis-spelling – 18th century) is a word we use to describe the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Representatives from the District (who are essentially from local churches in local circuits) meet annually at the Methodist Conference, which is the main decision-making body of the Church. This is the engine for much of what we do and our emerging priorities. Church at the Margins. New Places for New People. Social Justice (Walking with Micah). The Church's policy and process for God in Love Unites Us (same-sex marriage). The Methodist Way of Life. The Sing the Faith website (which helps a good number of our preachers). Our lobbying of the UK government. The list is endless.

The Connexion also provide support, in ways we can overlook. Whilst we need to adapt and adopt policies, much of this is done for us. Every local church is a charity through the Methodist Church.

The overriding principle behind 'the Connexion' through is that no Methodist Church exists in isolation. We have gifts to share with each other. If we think we can 'go it alone' we impoverish both ourselves and our neighbour. Together however, we are stronger. And Methodism has always cherished enabling local discipleship where we can sustain this – whether we be a larger or smaller, or a richer or poorer church.