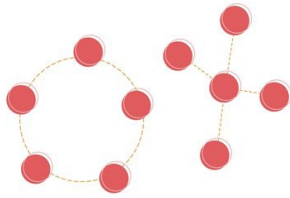


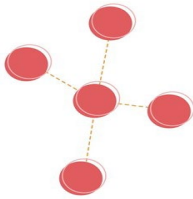
Different Models of Merger: Methodist Church Resource



There are currently two models of multi-site church being proposed as suitable for a Methodist context: the 'hub church' model and the 'sectional' model. In the 'hub church' model, several (probably smaller) churches become classes of a larger church. In the 'sectional' model, several churches join together to become one church on several sites. On this page you will see two entirely fictional accounts of Methodist circuits discerning and applying the two models. These accounts have been written in order to offer some creative possibilities and to demonstrate how the models might be applied.

A 'hub church' model

There are four Methodist churches in the suburbs and surrounding villages of a city with a large Methodist church of 150 members (C1). Two of the churches' memberships have already dipped below 12. Two others are still technically viable, but they decide not to wait until they are forced to reconsider their position. All four churches decide to become classes of the city centre church.



C2 is the smallest church, with 8 members. Its chapel is in an area of outstanding natural beauty, and the Church Council decides to retain the building. On Sunday mornings, the chapel continues to be used for traditional worship by the class. On Sunday afternoons, a group of volunteers from across the city and surrounding villages run 'Muddy Church': an outdoor creative service which is particularly suitable for children and their families. On other days of the week, the chapel is used as a retreat centre, hosting prayer retreats and away days in beautiful surroundings for a wide variety of community groups from the city and its suburbs. The class is small and in a fairly remote area: they decide not to send anyone to become part of C1's Church Council, and feel relieved that Trusteeship is being taken care of by others.

C3 has 17 members, and its chapel is situated in a suburb of the city where many people experience poverty. The Church Council are keen to retain a Methodist presence in this area, especially as all the other churches moved out long ago. A satellite food bank is needed for people who would struggle to reach the one in the city centre, but the chapel is in a poor state of repair and its rooms are unsuitable for this use. The chapel is sold and the funds used to lease a more suitable building and to get the food bank up and running, while funding is sought by the newly appointed manager. The class of 17 people continue to meet in a side room of the building that houses the food bank. One member of the class becomes a member of C1's Church Council.

C4 is the largest of the four smaller churches, with 22 members, and its chapel is situated in a wealthy suburb where many young families live. The building is sold and the proceeds used to start up a nursery for children whose parents commute into the city centre. The class divides into two groups who meet in people's homes. One of the groups includes parents of young children, and they decide to start an informal parenting support group. One member of the class becomes a member of C1's Church Council.

C5 has 11 members, and its chapel is situated in a village with poor transport links to the city and much hidden poverty. Another satellite food bank is needed, and although the chapel is old and a little shabby, the premises are adequate and the chapel is retained by the church. The manager of

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C3's food bank takes responsibility for this one too. A Sunday coffee morning replaces the traditional worship service, to try and combat the social isolation experienced by many people in this inaccessible place. The class of 11 people offer informal café-style worship for those who wish to opt in. The class decide not to send anyone to become part of C1's Church Council, largely because of the inadequate transport links. They feel relieved that Trusteeship is being taken care of by others.

C1 is enriched by its connections all over the city and its surrounding villages. Its members are able to support missional activities of various kinds, from Muddy Church to supporting parents to volunteering at one of the satellite food banks. All these missional activities are possible because of the strong Church Council, as well as the funds released by selling C3 and C4's chapels.

A 'sectional' model



There are five Methodist churches in and around Oldtown, all of which have become smaller over the years. Two of them have become too small to retain their own Church Council, with a third getting close to that point. The other two churches are larger, but are still finding it hard to find people to do all the jobs that need doing – let alone to reach their community with God's love. All five churches decide to join together as one multi-site church in five locations. Each former Local Church becomes known as 'Wesley Methodist Church at...' and the name of the town, village or suburb.

Wesley Methodist Church at Oldtown (C1) is the largest, with 29 members, and its chapel is in the largest population centre of the region. It receives a good level of lettings income from hiring out its rooms during the week, and this becomes an important income generator for the newly formed church in five locations. A retired PR executive from Wesley Methodist at Mountpleasant comes up with a simple marketing strategy and lettings income starts to increase year on year.

Wesley Methodist Church at Mountpleasant (C2) has a small congregation, but its chapel is in a strategically significant suburban location. Lots of new housing is planned, with building work scheduled to take place in several phases over the next ten years. The chapel is retained and plans for a New Place for New People to reach residents of the new housing estate are underway.

Wesley Methodist Church at Beacon Hill (C3) is a very small church in a suburb of Oldtown. The members are small in number but passionate about prayer and willing to try anything. It is agreed that the building be sold and the church meet in people's homes, seeking God for the next chapter of their common life.

Wesley Methodist Church at Green Hill (C4) is small but it is the only Christian group in the village, and its run-down chapel is the only community building. The chapel is retained, and it is open every day of the week for coffee mornings, a village shop and a sub-post office, as well as for Sunday worship.

Wesley Methodist Church at Castle Hill (C5) is large for a village church, with 22 members. There is, however, an attractive community centre in this well-to-do village, and the members decide that they would be more visible to their community if they met there instead. It is agreed that the chapel be sold and a chunk of the proceeds used to renovate the chapel at Green Hill.