

Welcome to Circuit for those who are new, and welcome to our circuit gathering.

I thought it might be helpful, especially to those who are new here, and perhaps new to the Methodist Church - what Circuit is, since this is a circuit gathering. I then want to say something about why we are gathered here, and the journey we hope to set out on.

So firstly, what is circuit? We have circulated already in churches a sheet by this name but we are aware that one of the challenges in any organisation is communication. And not everyone may have seen this.

The Circuit is a group of churches working together to support one another in God's mission. We are all part of the circuit, but we might not even realise it. The Circuit is led by us all, but at its heart is a team of people drawn from those churches. Essentially, we do three things. We listen to what the churches need. We resource churches with new ideas. We appoint staff. It is a mutual relationship. So whilst we might not see it, when we receive a local preacher or a minister on a Sunday, or material for arranging your own services, this is the circuit at work. When we ask Matt to come and help us, the circuit is at work.

Leaders from other denominations often talk about the circuit as one of the things that is special about Methodism, that they wish they had. The idea is that whilst we do our own thing, no church is on its own, people and resources are shared. By working together, we can achieve what we cannot do on our own.

Today is about those ideals - I do not want to predict what Matt is going to do, but our long-term goal is for us all to understand the joys and challenges that we face. We are here to listen to each other. We are here to ask how we might support each other in our local church witness. But most importantly, we are here to try and discern how God is calling us to work together.

That's a comment on circuit. But why are we here now?

I hope that folk have received the notices read out before worship and the information we have produced about the challenges we face. Our immediate challenge is in funding ministry. A portion of what you give to the local church in your offering goes towards meeting the costs of ministry, and in order to support the churches in challenging times, the circuit has used its reserves to ease this cost. We are now at a crucial point in that we face the prospect of reducing to one minister in 2025 when I leave. This is obviously not good. As things stand, we cannot solve this but we are looking at ways of how we can give ourselves more time to plan for the future through a mix of property sales and support from the District, who are the next level up. At the moment we have in place plans to at the very least, apply for a minister to carry on working with Rev Janet, buying us time, but not much time, to plan for the future.

The costs of ministry are significant. What we all seem to be agreed on is that if we want to move forward with two ministers, we are going to need a major uplift in giving from the churches. But overall, we need to find a radically different way of working together. One of the difficulties of this kind of exercise, aside from communication, is where we have conversations and about what. At our recent circuit meeting, which is open to all, we talked about finance in detail. Our predictions so far do not take account of what additional funding some churches may be able to give. Planning to see what is there in seven years is a real challenge. We can say more about finance but finance per se is not the point of this meeting.

One thing we do know is that whilst we can look to finance, we also need to have faith, and to discern what God wants of us. Today is the beginning of that journey