

Circuit Strategy Facts and Questions

With many things changing across the Circuit at the moment we would like to provide you with answers to some commonly asked questions.

The Circuit Strategy and mission plan was approved at the Circuit meeting of the 2nd of June. You can find a copy of the Circuit Vision and Mission Plan [here](#)

Finance

How will we reduce our expenses and stabilise our finances?

It will take time, but we have natural break points along the journey. For example, we will save some money from a reduction in ordained staff this September, when Rev Debbie Hodgson resumes her role as unpaid Supernumerary in our Circuit. Furthermore, next August (2027), contracts end for our Local Lay Pastors, Jonathan Hood and Brad Goddon-Smith. Finally, in August 2028, Rev Richard Harris' appointment within the Circuit comes to a natural conclusion. Currently, there are no plans to replace any of these four members of staff and so saving the Circuit significant sums.

How will reducing the number of church buildings help?

Initially, the cost savings from maintenance and management would be huge savings. Already, an assessment of half our estate suggests a conservative outlay of £1.5m will be needed in the next few years. When assessment concludes for all our churches, this figure will likely more than double. Having reviewed church reserves, these simply won't cover the cost alone and grants from Circuit and District will be required. It is arguably better to identify where buildings might be self-sufficient through their mission and community work, thereby bringing in income, and release the potential of others to fund the necessary improvements.

Secondly, reducing the buildings and thereby congregations will be necessary as we forecast a single Presbyter within our Circuit from 2028. Currently, overseeing 7 churches each extends our current Presbyters beyond that which is sustainable, both for them and our congregations.

What happens if this doesn't work or we still can't afford this model?

Our Mission Plan will be constantly reviewed and updated by Circuit Meeting. If we need to make adjustments, then we need to be agile in our approach, trying things and not being afraid to fail. Ongoing discernment and conferring is important as we seek God's mission across the Circuit.

Property

7 churches to 9?

Yes, well, 7 was a question of "how would that feel" – it was never a prescribed list nor final number. We actually have reduced to 6 Methodist Worship Centres, whilst accepting two sites could fall into the LEP pattern of fortnightly worship.

It appears the churches most at risk of change are in the old Bolsover and Staveley Circuit. Why is that?

There has been no intentional or strategic planning made that leads to certain churches being more prone to change than others. However, simple figures show that we have a number of small chapels which could benefit from coming together, stronger. Certainly, a number of those are geographically close. For example, the churches around Brimington, Inkersall, and Staveley are all of a low number that, when combined with Hall Road, could create a single, strong congregation of 80+.

It is important to note, however, that changes are being suggested for four churches in the Chesterfield area. The whole Circuit has been reviewed and so it's not really the case that Bolsover & Staveley, as was, is any more at risk of change than others.

Why are we only working on a plan for six 'worship centres'?

Predominantly, we see this number as both geographically viable and manageable for the forecasted staffing models. Property-wise, it is also a sensible and sustainable number of buildings which would enable the 600 or so Methodist members to meet together. Pastorally, we have set a line that says we wish to find a solution for all 600 members to move into a new understanding of Circuit and so having six centres for prayer, worship, and fellowship – to build each other up, encourage diversity of worship, to pray regularly together, and to be sent back into our communities – is appropriate for the number of members we have.

Where would these consolidated, merged congregations be?

We have suggested six worship centres to serve our 600 members. These would be placed in key geographical locations to ensure access to Sunday services remains part of our collective worship and discipleship. In addition, we recognise the potential for three mission centres that could provide additional Methodist services on a fortnightly basis. Across all these centres, we would encourage a diversity of worship to inspire and grow discipleship, whilst meeting the needs of the local communities, this could include communal worship being held on different days and in different styles, for example, Cafe style worship.

What will happen if churches merge together?

We are encouraging a pattern of merging, yes, rather than creating classes of another church. We have seen this in the past and it caused significant distress. Our vision is for the 600 members to work together as One Circuit, and so merging congregations on an equal footing into the new six 'worship centres' is vitally important. New trustee groups, or Church Councils, will be created whereby representation from each of the former congregations is assured. That way, we start on an equal footing, merge our membership lists, share our responsibilities and resources appropriately, and create a space for all to feel welcome.

How will the 'missional centres' work?

There are a number of opportunities to create lasting partnerships. For example, we already have this at Loundsley Green through the Local Ecumenical Partnership with our Anglican brothers and sisters. There are two other areas where partnerships might be developed. Interest in working with Derby Road Church has been expressed by various community leaders and groups, whilst the Storrs Road Church Centre has a number of links to the community already. We can still facilitate fortnightly Methodist worship – a pattern established at Loundsley Green – at such sites, whilst ensuring the building is sustainable, both financially and missionally. We also need to encourage those currently within such congregations to be part of the 'worship centre' model and so every other week still provides an opportunity to come together for collective prayer and worship.

Would we have Preachers for those fortnightly services or would they be Own Arrangements?

The Plan would ensure the Mission Centres receive preaching appointments for the two Sundays they are open. Should local groups wish to use those planned Sundays for Own Arrangements, then that would be on the Plan, but only at the specific request of the Church Council / delegated Leadership Team. We envisage the joint communion services still being held at the Worship Centres, too, for those Sundays where the Mission Centres would be closed.

Maintenance of Mission Centres

The reason both Storrs Road and Derby Road are being reimagined as Mission Centres is due to the potential to be both self-sustaining buildings and meeting community need. The Missional value needs to align with generated income.

Oversight of Mission Centres

A single Church Council is being considered to draw both Storrs Road and Derby Road together with Worship Centres at Hasland and Whittington Moor. This is to ensure adequate and appropriate Trusteeship over those four centres.

Who will be on the Church Council?

Representatives from each of the current four congregations will be invited to sit alongside Circuit officers to operate the Council.

Who will oversee Property and Finance on the Council?

This will be agreed as part of the formal merged Council. It is an opportunity for current officers among those congregations to either offer to continue or have permission to step down. CPD says no officer should serve more than six years, of course.

Won't each of the four congregations just look after their own positions?

This is a single Council with equal responsibility for all centres. The Council will also be part of the One Circuit Vision, whereby all support one another.

What roles will need to be held locally, in each centre?

When open for worship, local stewards are still required. Musicians, tech operators, etc may be needed as each centre requires. Ideally, these will be sourced locally and such roles defined by the new Church Council.

Oversight of the day-to-day mission at these centres will be in partnership with ecumenical and community groups, who would also be invited to be part of the Trustee Group / Church Council.

What if people don't want to stay in the reimagined Mission Centres?

Our narrative must be One Circuit and so everyone is free to find the places where their gifts and talents may be realised. We hope to see a diversity of worship emerging across our Circuit and so people may find new homes quite naturally.

Staff**Who is going to do all the Circuit level work?**

The Circuit employs various staff members already, be that Office support, Finance & Property Management, Local Lay pastors, and ordained staff. An appropriate and financially sustainable model is being proposed. Alongside employees, Methodism remains a Lay led denomination and so volunteers remain critical to the Circuit operations.

Are we not considering a second minister to replace Rev Harris in 2028?

We are looking at a possible Station in the Brimington-Staveley area that might pick up some of the NPNP work Jonathan has started in Barrow Hill, continue the Inkersall 'Community-First' project that Brad is leading, the schools work that Tom does in Duckmanton, and help with the

work Edge currently do in Staveley. The Steering Group wisely suggested this may require a Deacon to work with mission in these communities. Adding a Diaconal appointment to the staff team, which will be a single Presbyterian (Mark) and single Local Lay Pastor (Tom) from 2028, would be advantageous if we can afford a second minister.

Can we still serve our membership if we reduce the number of staff and buildings?

We currently have an estimated 600 members across our 14 churches. In some buildings, we have congregations of no more than 15. CPD, our guiding practices and disciplines, state that any congregation of less than 12 members for four consecutive quarters will cease to be recognised as a congregation. Similarly, CPD suggests no church officer should serve more than 6 years. Therefore, we clearly need to take action to safeguard our members on both these fronts. Merging congregations and creating larger, stronger churches for worship and mission would enable the Circuit to consolidate into a position of relative strength whilst continuing to serve members across all our communities, as we look for renewed growth.

Why does the Circuit need administrators/office staff?

There is a common misconception that a church can and does run entirely on the work of those who are forward facing.

However, administration staff enable the ministers, lay pastors and others to carry out their vital spiritual and pastoral roles without the pressure of the additional administration requirements.

Administrators work in the background, often unseen, to organise resources, develop promotional needs, and essentially, finance and property support, also ensuring all churches are compliant with the required laws and policies, protecting them from legal risks, they also liaise with the District and help to implement the directives from them as required. This is just a snapshot of what they do and their role is ever evolving in line with what is needed by the circuit.

Ultimately, the effective use of administrators helps to prevent pastoral burnout and makes sure the churches remain sustainable and mission focused. Administrators work faithfully to protect unity across the circuit, support preaching, strengthen trust in the church and find practical ways in which systems can be built to serve people and not just the processes.

Other

Is there still opportunity to change our Mission Plans?

The Strategic Vision and Mission Plan is a working document, aimed at providing a foundation for further discernment and growth. We will be reviewing the document at every Circuit Meeting to ensure it remains 'fit for purpose'. As we discover new things, as subtle changes occur, and as growth is encouraged and happens, the Plan will adjust accordingly.

How can I get more involved?

Pray!

We are encouraging everyone to pray about our future direction and to seek God's guidance. We would encourage everyone to do this in their personal quiet times, in their small groups, and in their churches. If you wish to start a small group – and that can be anything from a Bible study, a prayer group, a book club or walking group; anything that draws us together for prayer and conversation – then please do speak to your local Church Steward or Minister. And then **share!** Speak to your minister or church leader and share where you feel God might be leading us.

We are also constantly seeking new Circuit Stewards to join the Circuit Leadership Team – the group that works on behalf of the Circuit Meeting between sessions. If you would like to know more, please speak to one of our ministers or current Circuit Stewards.

If the question you have isn't answered here, please contact the Circuit office who will endeavour to find out the answer for you and add it to the Circuit Strategy Facts and Questions on the webpage.