Statement of Significance

Central Methodist Church

Saltergate

Chesterfield

October 2026



Introduction

This Statement of Significance has been developed to describe the building's historical, architectural and social importance. It identifies key elements of the church's design, construction and historical narrative, while also considering its evolving role as a place of worship and community engagement.

The purpose of this Statement is twofold:

1. To document and celebrate the unique heritage of Central Methodist Church, ensuring its value is recognized and protected for future generations.
2. To provide a robust framework for planning future changes, ensuring that they are informed by a clear understanding of the church's significance. This includes balancing preservation with practical adaptations that support the church's mission and its role in the wider community.

This Statement of Significance was developed by a small group of church members:

Richard Gostling

Anne Hayes

Brian Offiler

David Humphrey

Debbie Andrews

with support from members of the congregation and from John Tranter, archivist for the Derbyshire North-East Methodist Circuit.

It was adopted by the Church Council on 20th October, 2026, and it will be revisited at regular intervals to ensure that it continues to be relevant, particularly when any proposals for repairs, projects or developments are to be considered.

October 2026

Central Methodist Church, Chesterfield

Statement of Significance

Overview

Central Methodist Church, located on Saltergate in Chesterfield, is a busy, active church focussing on worship, personal spiritual development, outreach and community service. The church is a grade II listed building of exceptional historical, architectural and communal value. It is one of Britain's larger Methodist church buildings and has a footfall of about 1,000 people each week.

Saltergate is one of the main and most ancient thoroughfares through the town and forms part of the Chesterfield Town Centre Conservation Area, which was designated in 1976. This central location, amidst the surrounding mixture of Victorian and Edwardian structures interspersed with modern commercial developments, enables the church building to stand out, both as an enduring symbol of 19th century ecclesiastical design, as well as being a visible and prominent centre for worship and community engagement within the town centre today.

Central Methodist Church
38, Saltergate
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S40 1UH

Derbyshire North-East Methodist Circuit,

Sheffield Methodist District

Grid Reference - SK 383713 What3Words Location – analogy.press.hints



Historical Development – The First Two Centuries

Origins of Methodism in Chesterfield

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, visited Chesterfield in July 1776 ‘en route’ from Sheffield, having been invited by an acquaintance to ‘give a sermon’. Wesley preached in the Market Place, laying the foundation for Methodism in the area. He returned to preach again the following year, fostering the growth of a Methodist community.

In 1781, Benjamin Wilkinson, a local preacher, attempted to preach in Chesterfield’s Market Place and on Spital Green, facing hostility from the locals. Later, another preacher, Andrew Inglis, was arrested for preaching in the Market Place but was encouraged by the Mayor to find an indoor venue. This led to the use of the 'Blue Meeting House' in Froggatt’s Yard, provided by the Independents, and a Wesleyan Society was formed, later meeting in a room in Moore's Yard, off Packers Row, marking a significant step in Methodism’s establishment in Chesterfield.

Wesleyan Chapel

The first Methodist chapel in Chesterfield was a Wesleyan Chapel built on the current site in 1795 at a cost of £447, partly funded by collections in 26 other chapels, including as far away as Leeds, Pontefract and Wakefield. This was enlarged in 1822 and 1828 but was still not adequate for the needs of the congregation.

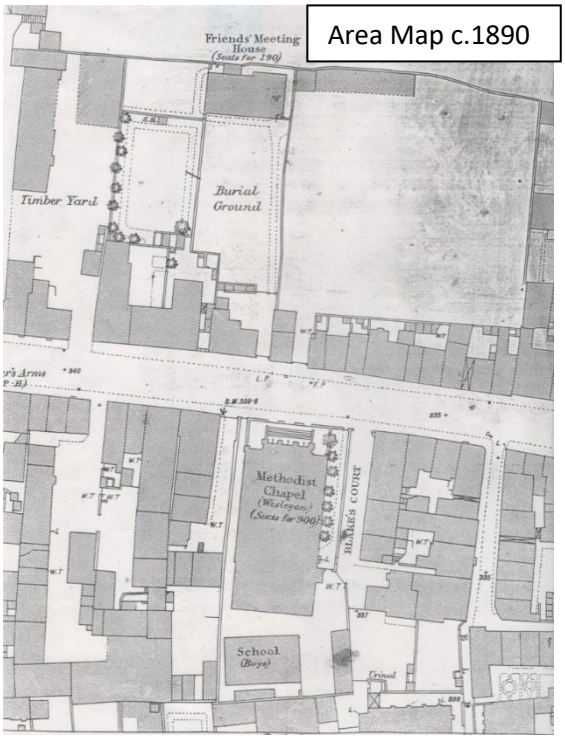




The existing building was constructed in 1869-70 at a cost of over £3,700. It included a panelled gallery extending around the chapel and could hold a total congregation of 700. It was enhanced with the installation of a pipe organ in 1875.



In 1888 a further building consisting of classrooms, a ‘quiet room’ and a games room with a large school room above was built, and at about the same time, an extension was built onto the gable end of the church to house vestries, a lecture hall, a choir vestry, a ladies’ parlour and a tiny kitchen.



Area Map c.1890

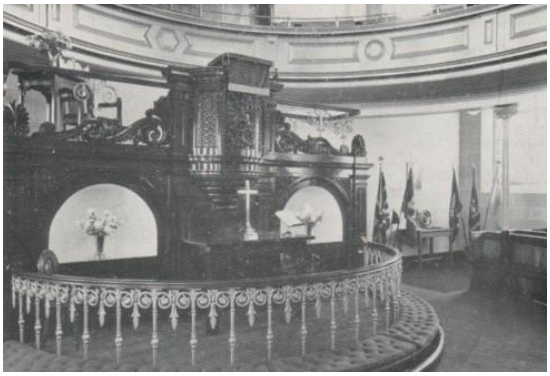
In 1908 the church trustees purchased the neighbouring property, which had previously been the Milton’s Head public house, including a skittle ground, stables and a pig cote. This site was later used for the caretaker’s cottage until the redevelopment of the 1980s.

Development of Primitive Methodism in Chesterfield

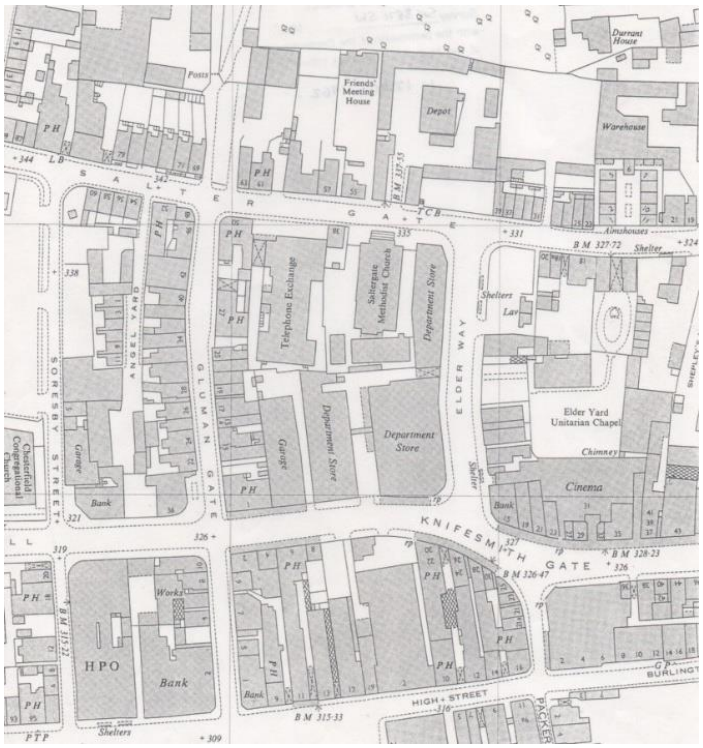
Primitive Methodism had been introduced into the area when the Rev. Jeremiah Gilbert had preached in Bolsover Market Place on the 18th May, 1819, leading to his arrest and imprisonment. By 1881 the growing congregation of Primitive Methodists led to the building of Holywell Cross Primitive Methodist Church, just a short distance from the Wesleyan Chapel on Saltergate, at a cost of £5,000, with its Sunday School building being extended around the turn of the century.

Saltergate Methodist Church

The name of the Wesleyan Chapel changed in 1932, following UK Methodist re-union, to become Saltergate Methodist Church.



A major overhaul of the organ was undertaken in 1936 with 8 further ranks of pipes added, and in 1954 the organ was cleaned and the sanctuary completely redecorated with new lighting and the dark wood pews stripped and lightened.



Area Map 1962

Central Methodist Church

Following Holywell Cross Primitive Methodist Church uniting with Saltergate Methodist Church in 1971, the headstone of Jeremiah Gilbert was relocated to rest in the wall of the Saltergate building, which now became known as Central Methodist Church.

1980s Re-development

During the 1980s the church building underwent significant redevelopment.

By the mid 1970s several problematic issues with aspects of the church building were apparent - antiquated toilets, unhygienic and inadequate kitchen facilities, structural problems, poor internal and external decoration, a worn-out organ and an inefficient heating system. Initially, buying a new pipe organ was considered, but the very large estimated cost of this led to the question being posed, “Why not build a new church?”.

Attempts to explore options to redevelop the site and fund a new church in collaboration with its neighbours – the District Cooperative Society and the Post Office – came to nothing.

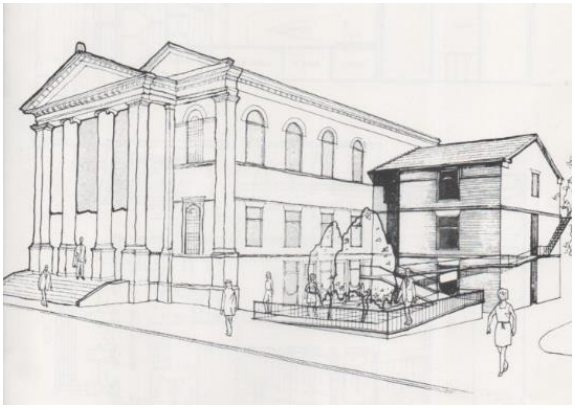
A series of ‘Open Door’ meetings followed by regular meetings for prayer and bible study encouraged the congregation to develop ideas and believe in the possibility of a new church.

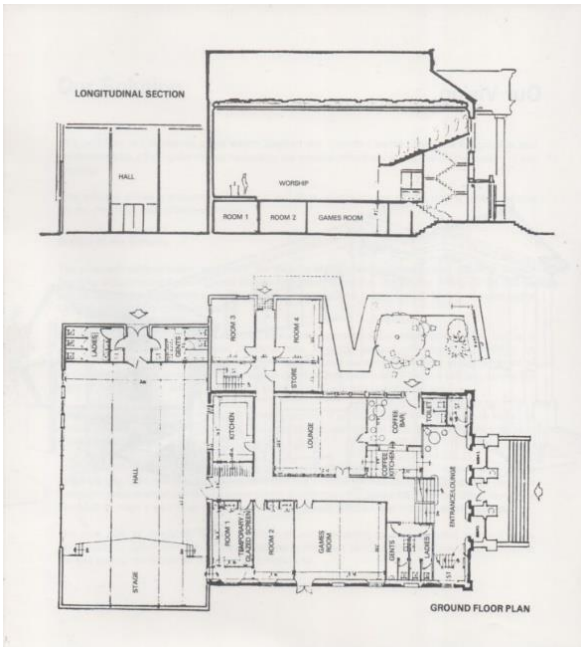
A number of options were developed for the way forward:

- To sell and move – this was discounted due to the economic climate at the time;
- To make the necessary repairs - but this would not reduce the high running costs;
- To demolish and rebuild the ancillary buildings – but this would not address the inadequate sanctuary heating system;
- To utilise the sanctuary and raise the floor level to provide purpose made facilities on a new ground floor.

In February 1982 the Church Council approved the final option to be presented to all groups within the church family, but the subsequent ballot of church members proved to be inconclusive. At a further meeting in June 1982, Church Council took the lead, re-affirming its support for this option, and arrangements were made to move forward with a consultation along with a day of Prayer and a Pledge Day. The resulting pledges represented significant sacrificial giving by members of the church family, and combined with funds from the sale of the Holywell Cross premises and grants from the Circuit, Methodist Home Mission Division and the Rank Trust, this enabled work to start in 1984.

The first phase of the work involved construction of a new suite of rooms underneath the sanctuary, comprising a lounge, a coffee bar and book shop ('Cornerstone' with direct access from the courtyard), a main kitchen, a snooker room (incorporating the 'Institute' Snooker Club into the main church building from an outbuilding), additional smaller meeting rooms and new toilets.





Alongside this development, a new wing was added to the side of the building to house two vestries, a meeting room, a print room and a caretaker's flat. This also allowed for a ramp to be built to provide step-free access to the sanctuary.

The second phase of work would include construction of a new hall, including a stage, dressing rooms and toilets at the back of the main building.

During the first phase of the redevelopment, Sunday morning services were held at St Helena School, with evening services in the old school room at the back of the building.

Once the new wing had been completed, the old caretaker's cottage was demolished, and one thousand of its bricks were dressed by members of the congregation, to be used to pave the front courtyard outside the Cornerstone bookshop and coffee bar, adjacent to where the cottage had stood - a link between the old and the new.

The exterior of the church building remained unchanged due to the grade II listing being in place.

Within the sanctuary, which was re-configured to hold 500 people, the coffered ceiling, one of the largest of its kind in the country, remained in place, whilst the rest of the sanctuary was re-modelled.

The removal of the original pews transformed it into a versatile open plan space, with many of the existing features being incorporated into the new design. The pine from some of the old pews was made into a new pulpit, communion table and font, some pieces incorporating decoration from the old pulpit. This new furniture was shaped to reflect the arches at the front entrance to the church building.





The cross, hung prominently at the front of the sanctuary, was also made from the old pews, and the protective canopy above it was made to represent the wings of the Cherubim over the Mercy Seat (referred to in Exodus 25, v.20).

The original, worn-out pipe organ was replaced with a contemporary electronic organ.

A large piece of wood panelling from the former gallery was used to make the new balcony front.

Once completed, the sanctuary was decorated, with the colour scheme reflecting the existing stained-glass windows, and the Corinthian columns that had supported the old balcony were used to frame the new doorways and provide lighting support.



Updated heating and lighting systems were introduced to enhance comfort and functionality. A hearing loop was installed and the acoustics improved so that the space could be used for performances and events, in addition to worship services.

The Church was re-opened and re-dedicated on 4th May 1985.

The second phase of the work, the building of the new Hall, began in November 1986. This was completed and opened in September 1987.

The Church Hall provides a multi-functional space that is used by the Centrepoint luncheon club, the uniformed organisations, the Toddlers group, the Ukrainian Drop-In and for short-mat bowling and chair-based exercises.



This redevelopment was an enormous task, yet the funds were raised (a total of £461,000 for both stages) and a very successful outcome achieved.

Extensive repairs to the church roof in 1993/94 were funded from a Building Fund set up with the balance of monies from the 1980s redevelopment scheme.

Architectural Features

The church is a prominent example of Renaissance Revival architecture with its grand proportions, classical design elements and high quality materials. There is an imposing façade including Ionic columns, a detailed pediment and carefully designed arched windows, making it a striking feature of the streetscape, contributing to the identity and character of the surrounding area.

In 1976 the church building was grade II listed (Historic England list entry number 1088234).

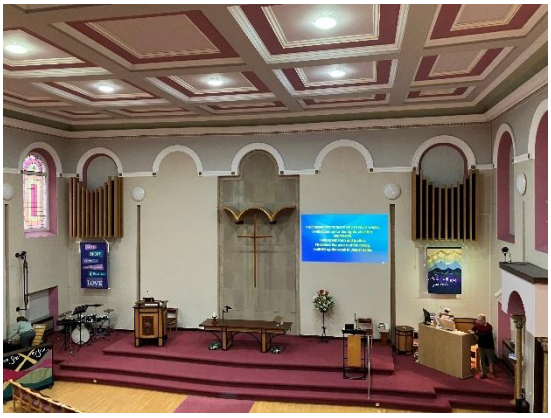
External Features

- **Façade** - The ashlar stone façade is a hallmark of the church's architectural significance. The plinth, cornice frieze, and modillion cornice highlight the attention to classical detailing, creating a grand and formal appearance that evokes stability and respectability.
- **Portico** - The giant portico is the centerpiece of the design, featuring two Ionic columns and square pilasters that support a pediment adorned with a modillion cornice and palmette finial. This combination of symmetry and classical proportions is typical of Renaissance Revival architecture, symbolizing the aspirations of the Victorian Methodist movement to create buildings that inspire awe and reverence.



- **Entrances** - The grand entrances, with their six-panelled doors beneath broken pediments, emphasize the church's role as a significant public building. The steps leading to the main entrance reinforce its commanding presence on Saltergate.
- **Windows** - The church's fenestration includes round-arched windows with moulded archivolts on the upper storey and segmental-arched windows with moulded architraves on the ground floor. These windows provide a harmonious balance of light and shadow, enhancing the building's overall aesthetic while ensuring ample natural light reaches the interior.

Internal Features



- **Coffered Ceiling** - One of the largest coffered ceilings in the country.
- **Flexible Layout** - During the 1980's renovations, the removal of the original pews transformed the interior into a versatile, open-plan space. This layout supports both worship and other community activities, reflecting the Methodist commitment to adaptability and inclusivity.



- **Decorative Details** - Key interior elements, such as plaster mouldings and detailed window tracery, highlight the quality of craftsmanship. The decoration of the ceiling, walls and flooring in the sanctuary reflects the coloured glass in the arched windows and is strikingly mainly pink and green.
- **Updated Facilities** - Modern heating, lighting, and audio-visual systems have been discreetly integrated into the historic fabric of the building, enhancing its functionality while preserving its architectural integrity.

Materials and Craftsmanship

The construction materials demonstrate a thoughtful balance between aesthetic appeal and durability:

- **Ashlar Stone** - The façade is constructed of high-quality ashlar stone, a material chosen for its fine finish and ability to withstand weathering. Its use reflects the Methodist Church's desire to convey permanence and solidity.
- **Brickwork** - The side elevations feature red brick, accented with decorative bands and eaves cornices. This use of brick not only reduced costs but also provided a complementary contrast to the stone façade, demonstrating a practical yet elegant approach to design.
- **Roofing** - The slate roof is typical of 19th-century ecclesiastical architecture, offering a durable and fire-resistant covering that aligns with the overall design's emphasis on longevity.

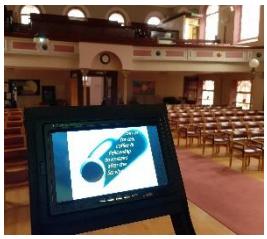
Ongoing Development and Mission in the 21st Century

Improvement Projects

In 2018 an initiative entitled 'Central's Mission and Vision Programme' was launched. This looked at the mission of the church and resulted in a substantial programme of improvements to the building to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century. These were the first significant works since the major remodelling and extensions in the 1980s.

The priorities approved by Church Council were to:

- Improve Accessibility – installation of a lift and upgrade of the sound system in the sanctuary;
- Renew IT and Improve IT Support for Worship – new telephone system, new microphones, new projector, new mixing desk, new video equipment and tablets for preachers;



- Redevelop Cornerstone – Bookshop and coffee bar refurbishment and accessible toilet alterations;
- Improve the Entrance Foyer – to create a more welcoming space.

An appeal was made for pledges of funding from church members and this raised in excess of £50,000. In addition, grants were secured from the Circuit and other sources, and together with Central's own Development Fund, a total budget of £107,200 was approved.



The largest single item of expenditure was the installation of an internal lift, previously considered impossible, but enabled by the engineering ingenuity of two members of the congregation via internal remodelling of the premises. This project and the consequential works to create a new print room and meeting room, cost approximately £50,000.

All the approved works were completed within the approved budget by 2021.

Around this time the electronic organ that had been installed as part of the 1980s redevelopment was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, and it was replaced in December, 2022 at a cost of £28,000, funded largely by a generous donation.

Two further building improvement projects were carried out in 2024 and 2025.

In June 2024 approval was given for the complete refurbishment and modernisation of the kitchen which is extensively used by Central's own groups and other community groups hiring the premises. The project, at a cost of approximately £41,000, was funded largely via a generous legacy and was completed in June 2025.



In February 2025 approval was given to undertake a project to replace the church boiler. It had been recognised for some time that the old church boiler was unreliable and that parts to mend the boiler were increasingly difficult to source. During the winter of 2024/25 the boiler failed on several occasions. The new energy efficient boiler was installed in the summer of 2025 at a total cost of approximately £61,000, funded from a combination of legacy funds, grant funding and Central's property funds.

Ongoing Mission

The Central Methodist Church premises were originally built, and over time have been developed and redeveloped, to provide a range of settings and facilities for the worship and mission of the church community. Over the years it has attempted to describe and demonstrate the Christian faith that is the foundation of all that it does in ways that can be meaningful to those not familiar with Christian beliefs or traditions, such as through the statement of belief shown in the box below.

Our Faith

We believe that the universe, and everything that was, is, or will be within it, exists not by chance, but through the action of one God.

We believe:

- **that this one God exists outside the realm of time and space** in a way which is entirely outside our ability to understand, and that the workings and purpose of God are, and always will be, mysterious to those alive on this earth. We believe, but cannot explain, that part of the mystery of creation is that people are not like puppets, moved at the will of God, but have been given the freedom to make moral choices.

- **that this one God,** although outside the realm of time and space, is also involved in it, and **became part of the ordinary world in the person of Jesus**, who proclaimed a new 'Kingdom of God', and explained the meaning of life in a profoundly different and challenging way. We believe that the message of Jesus upset the religious authorities of the day so greatly that He was executed, but that the power of God is shown by Jesus' triumph over death itself.

- **that Jesus is made real now in a spiritual way**, showing us that His death and ongoing life symbolise the evil in the world and the ultimate triumph of love over evil, and remind us that when we accept for ourselves our human weaknesses, we are able to become members of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed.

We believe that because God is, and always will be, outside our ability to understand fully, then we can all learn from others. We therefore welcome newcomers, believing that we have something to offer each other.

As part of the Methodist Connexion nationally the church has developed a Mission Statement which identifies the church's calling as being to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It seeks to fulfil this calling in the following ways:

- Worship - to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love;
- Learning & Caring - to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care;
- Service - to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice;
- Evangelism - to make more followers of Jesus Christ.

recognising opportunities for collaborative working with other Christian communities as part of the Derbyshire North-East Methodist Circuit and within Christians Together for Chesterfield.

Worship



The principal coming together of the church community is in Sunday morning worship, which is usually live streamed, providing access for those unable to attend in person. This aims to incorporate a variety of traditional and contemporary elements and styles to provide meaningful worship for both current and potentially new members, including provision for children and young people, through all-age worship or children's activities and creche. It is supported by various musical inputs (organ, piano, worship band), the Prayer Ministry Team, the Tech Team and visual decoration through floral art and banners.

In addition there is a weekday service on Friday lunchtimes, to provide opportunity for worship for those in the town centre, and creative activity-based Messy Church services are held during school holidays, particularly for children and families.

The church hosts special services of worship at significant Christian festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, both for its own congregation and for other groups within the community, as well as being available for Christian wedding, funeral and thanksgiving services.

Learning & Caring

In addition to the teaching and learning elements within the worship services, there are opportunities for developing knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and discipleship through:

- A Sunday evening youth meeting for young people;
- A number of small House Groups which meet regularly;
- A weekly Sisterhood meeting;
- Training events in respect of safeguarding, pastoral ministry and equality, diversity and inclusion.

There is regular prayer support of the church's activities, the church family and wider concerns of the community – locally, nationally and globally – through weekly meetings of both the Prayer Ministry Team and Celtic Morning Prayer.

A large number of Pastoral Visitors provide pastoral care for members of the church community through regular visits and prayerful support.

The church offers opportunities for members of the church community and others to meet socially through regular women's groups, short-mat bowling and snooker, as well as shared church family meals periodically.

Service – Engagement with the Local Community

The church pursues a policy of voluntary community service through a variety of regular activities, including:

- The 'Cornerstone' coffee bar and bookshop, a Christian resource centre operating 5 days per week, providing a safe place to meet for refreshments in a friendly, supportive environment. A proportion of any surplus proceeds support the church's outreach activities;



- The Centrepoint weekly luncheon club, providing a cooked meal and companionship;
- Weekly meetings of Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers groups;
- A weekly Toddler group for parents, carers and their toddlers;
- A weekly 'Warm Space' during winter months, providing a meal and opportunity to meet others in a friendly, supportive environment;
- A monthly Memory Café for those living with dementia and those supporting them;
- A Drop-in centre for Ukrainian refugees.



The Church Lounge hosts the Cornerstone coffee bar, Warm Space and Memory Café.

Additionally Central provides facilities for external community groups to meet regularly, including the Chesterfield Philharmonic Choir, a chair-based exercise group and a macular support group, as well as hosting public performances and concerts by groups on occasions.

Central seeks to be aware of, and respond to, the needs of the wider world, both locally and globally, through specifically focussed meetings and worship, encouraging participation in, and providing grants to support, the work of national and local charities. It is designated as a Fair-Trade Church and aims to apply the principles of fair trade in its operations.

Evangelism

Through all of its activities, be they as part of worship, learning and caring or community engagement, Central seeks to make known and demonstrate the love of God.

This includes developing the understanding and confidence of its members to speak of God and to live in their contemporary surroundings as disciples of Jesus.

The church provides grant funding for a number of outreach projects and activities, including national Methodist charities, and it also undertakes specific acts of outreach, such as the distribution of small gifts and Christian literature in its locality at Christmas and Easter.



Resourcing the Activities of the Church

A core aspect of the ethos of Central is that of ‘Stewardship’, i.e. the generous giving of time, talents and money by the worshipping community is the basis for delivering its mission.

The funding of the church’s day-to-day activities is, to a very large extent, provided through giving from the congregation. In this way, the church is able to concentrate its energy on delivering the activities listed above, and also to set aside 10% of regular freewill giving for the ‘Caring for Others’, which includes regular donations to national Methodist and local charities. Additionally, from its inception, it was resolved that any surplus from the Cornerstone bookshop and coffee bar would be used, not for day-to-day activities, but for outreach into the community.

The delivery of the church’s activities is made possible by the dedication of not just the Minister and a small number of paid staff (either directly by Central or by the Derbyshire North East Methodist Circuit), but also by the generous offering of time and talents by a large number of the members of the church’s community, in planning and leading activities, in managing its operations and in undertaking regular maintenance of the property.

Future Aims and Challenges

Whilst acknowledging the significance of its cultural, architectural and missional heritage, the church aims to continue to fulfil its calling into the future and to explore ways in which it can respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ in the context of each particular age to come.

In seeking to live out its discipleship in worship and mission, it recognises the challenge of balancing the preservation of its heritage with the importance of meeting current and future needs, both for its own church community and for its engagement with and service to the wider community, in order to enable it to continue to be a vibrant place of worship and community activity.

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