

Kendal Methodist Circuit

Priorities for Action 2016 – 2021

updated Spring 2019

Some General Background

All of the mainstream Christian denominations find themselves in a state of flux. Society and culture is changing quickly and our organisations cannot keep up. In the Kendal Methodist Circuit this has often resulted in an approach to planning that is haphazard and reacting to other peoples' agendas in an immediate operational way rather than in a more thoughtful and strategic manner. This has meant that we have not always been able to make the best use of all our resources to further God's work in this place.

We must also recognise that in recent years our resources have shrunk in terms of people, finance, and buildings that are fit for purpose. If we are to reverse this trend and start to plan for success rather than manage decline then we must be organised.

The Kendal Methodist Circuit is a group of nine church communities: Fellside, Stricklandgate, Sandylands, Cowan Bridge, Kirkby Lonsdale, Milnthorpe, Levens, Storth and Arnside. It sits within the wider structure of the Cumbria Methodist District and the national Methodist Connexion. The Circuit is the level at which the resources of staffing and housing are deployed, and has also traditionally been seen as the main unit of mission. The Circuit does not control local churches, but is an expression of the interconnectedness between those churches.

The Circuit is not a group of people separate from local churches, it is representatives from all the churches meeting and working together for the common good. The Circuit works through the Circuit Stewards and Circuit Staff and makes its decisions through the Circuit Meeting.



Rather than create a static Circuit Strategy document, the Circuit Staff and Stewards have worked to produce a set of seven Priorities for Action which can be used to inform and shape our decision making over the coming years with regard to how we deploy our resources and how we develop partnerships with others.

The Priorities for Action are broad in nature, and then are developed with some more detail. This detail will inevitably change over time. All of this is a 'work in progress' that will be shaped by the interaction between different churches and the Circuit. It is about a partnership so as to achieve the best possible outcomes with our resources – not a top-down blueprint to be forced upon each and every church community.

Some Specific Background

The Kendal Methodist Circuit spent almost all of 2016 in consultation and conversations between Circuit Stewards, Staff and Churches – looking at its current situation and context and trying to prioritise where its resources might best be used over the next five to ten years so as to achieve a Circuit that can:

- be more pro-active in discerning the work of God that the Methodist people are called to do
- work together in co-operation with one another – valuing our inter-connectedness
- be a positive part of the county ecumenical agenda

and in doing this we would also expect to develop strong, committed Christian communities that have a real sense of discipleship along with a heart for mission.

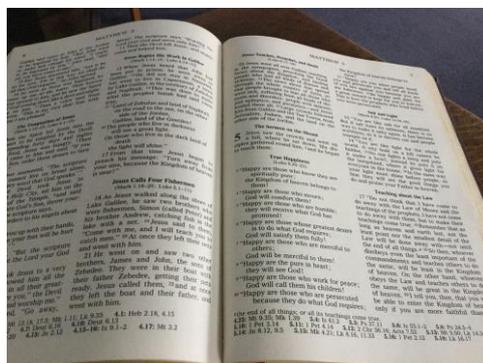
During 2016 the Circuit Stewards met with every church individually to collect feedback and ideas that have gone into creating our Priorities for Action which was launched at the beginning of 2017. Over the past two years this has provided both a framework and a focus for our actions and decision making as we journey together to achieve the objectives stated above.

In this latest refresh of the document written in January 2019, we provide additional commentary on the progress made over the past two years and make refinements as we steer a course guided by changes that have taken place and based on your feedback. One change you may notice is that the six priorities have become seven as we have taken Worship and Discipleship and split it into two separate priorities in order to provide a better focus to each area.

Common Themes

As the document has been revised, we have realised that there are a number of important themes that will be present in multiple, if not all, the Priorities for Action. We have chosen to draw attention to these as common themes rather than establish them as additional priorities, and are as follows:

- **Ecumenism.** There is an increasing amount of ecumenical work going on in the Circuit, and a growing number of ecumenical partnerships between our churches and those of other denominations as evidenced in Storth and now Kirkby Lonsdale. We will continue to bring a focus to ecumenism as it is recognised as being key to the longer-term regeneration of the Christian faith in our society.
- **Youth.** We acknowledge that work is needed here to provide opportunities and encouragement to engage young people in all parts of Church life. In particular, we will look to restart the Education and Youth Committee, and as we do so, we can expect there to be more visibility of youth engagement in the future.



Priorities for Action 2016 – 2021 and beyond

Our Priorities for Action, Strategic Intent, Methods of Achievement, Progress and Actions going forward, are listed below:



Priority 1: PRAYER

Our Strategic Intent is that every church and the circuit values prayer above all else.

We define prayer in the broadest terms as being ‘intentionally focused on God’

Our Method of Achievement will be to appoint a Prayer Champion at Circuit level, who offers encouragement and practical support for the development of the prayer life in each church, and across the Circuit. We hope that this will lead to the appointment of a Prayer Champion by every local church.

Our Conversations revealed a great desire to ‘do better’ in prayer, but also a wide range of experience and initiatives which could be shared across the Circuit. Examples of this are the Circuit prayer meetings, the Praise & Prayer services at Arnside, the prayer chain at Kirkby Lonsdale and Prayer Tree at Sandylands.

Our Progress during the past two years started well with an increase in activities initiated by churches for people to engage in prayer for their communities and the wider church. The churches have been active setting up prayer groups and providing support for existing ones. There have been different services around the Circuit which have a prayer focus, such as Praise & Prayer at Arnside, and the Circuit prayer evenings held for Ash Wednesday and All Souls, and the Advent Prayer events organised by MWIB. In the future we are looking to develop Stricklandgate as a Prayer Centre.



Our Actions for the coming period will be to continue the work to develop a Prayer Centre at Stricklandgate and accelerate the appointment of the Prayer Champion who can encourage, coordinate and lead sustainable growth in the Prayer activities across the Circuit. Our aim is to have someone appointed to this role from September 2019.



Priority 2: **WORSHIP**

Our Strategic Intent is that each church community is able to offer a high-quality worship experience appropriate for its existing congregation(s) and that either acting alone or in partnership with other churches is able to offer an alternative style of worship experience appropriate to those on the margins of the current church congregation(s).

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. Recruitment and development of more Local Preachers and Worship Leaders
2. Reviewing with each church community their current approach to worship and their ideas for the future
3. Encouraging the development of centres of excellence in different styles of worship across the circuit and/or sections
4. Using Circuit services as an opportunity to enable people to experience different approaches to worship

Our Conversations revealed people were eager to experience different worship styles – possibly by organising visits to other churches. They also revealed that there was a lot of good already going on within the Circuit, but it was difficult to see how we act as one body or have a common vision. It also suggested that we should make available different styles of worship for different age groups.

Our Progress has been to recognise, promote and celebrate the diversity of worship that already exists within the Circuit as evidenced by examples such as Messy Church at Sandylands, the work of the Family Worker project at Kirkby Lonsdale, and Walk Through Nativity in Milnthorpe (December 2018). We also have a number of Circuit Services, for example to receive the Easter Offering, that provide different approaches to worship.

However, we have yet to review the current and future ideas for worship with each church, so our Action will be to organise and undertake this activity together with the Local Preacher and Worship Leader community within the Circuit.



Priority 3: DISCIPLESHIP

Our Strategic Intent is that each member of a church community has ample opportunity to develop their discipleship in a variety of ways.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. Promoting the idea of local 'Discipleship Groups'* for each church community – and that over time the norm of belonging to a church community includes membership of a Discipleship Group. We need, also, to do some educational work about what we mean by Discipleship so that we all have a common understanding of what is meant when we talk about Discipleship and Discipleship groups.
2. Organising a number of discipleship development opportunities at a Circuit level – including study days, retreat days, training days etc.

Our Conversations revealed that the presence of Discipleship Groups makes a big difference to a church community. They also revealed that there was a lot of good already going on within the Circuit but it was difficult to see how we act as one body or have a common vision.

*The idea of Discipleship Groups is that they focus on developing our commitment to following and witnessing to Jesus Christ. Many existing house groups and Bible study groups already do that and will continue unchanged. We have used the title Discipleship Group because it is more intentional. Such groups would include prayer, care for one another, Bible study, and the encouragement necessary for living a Christian life.

Our Progress in this area over the two years has been limited due to priorities in other areas, but we have obtained a grant from the Cumbria District and purchased 100 copies of "A Discipling Presence" written by the Methodist and URC Churches. This is a workbook that can be used by small groups to help promote and sustain an effective Christian presence in rural communities.



Our Actions going forward include the planning of a Circuit Weekend that will provide opportunities for disciple development, and we will also look to source some educational material about what we mean by discipleship, perhaps in the form of a series of services/sermons that can be used by the churches.



Priority 4: **MISSION**

Our Strategic Intent is our church communities become skilled and confident in reaching out beyond their buildings and existing congregation(s) to share the Good News in a way that is attractive and appealing.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. Appointing a Mission Champion at Circuit level who offers encouragement and practical support for the development of the mission focus in each church, and across the Circuit. We hope that this will lead to the appointment of a Mission Champion by every local church.
2. Encouraging all the Discipleship Groups to follow at least one short course a year that is focused in some way on mission; and by offering opportunities for people to 'have a go' at mission in a safe and positive environment.

Our Conversations revealed that people have a sense that they should be doing more, but feel that they lack confidence and skills. There is also a desire to pool resources, work more ecumenically and to reach out to groups in our communities.

Our Progress to date has been to appoint a Circuit Mission Champion to work with churches in the development of their Mission focus, to encourage others moving into this area, and to listen to what is happening and what support is needed.

Our Actions in the coming period will be to continue to support the Mission Champion and provide support where possible to churches seeking to develop and grow their mission focus.



Priority 5: LOCAL PREACHERS & LEADERS OF WORSHIP

Our Strategic Intent is that our Local Preachers and Worship Leaders are the best skilled and supported that they can possibly be to deliver a range of high quality worship experiences across the circuit and appropriate to differing local contexts.

Our Method of Achievement will be to:

1. Change the structure of the Local Preachers & Worship Leaders meetings to include more training and skills development, and offer more challenge and inspiration
2. Seek expertise from outside of the Circuit and make it available to all Local Preachers and Worship Leaders
3. Create a budget for resources for Local Preachers and Worship Leaders.

Our Conversations revealed that Worship Leaders are often little understood by congregations and under-utilised by Local Preachers; there is a perception that the training for Local Preachers is too long/difficult and that is why we don't have more of them. They also revealed the success some Churches have had at bringing people from outside the Circuit to preach.

Our Progress has been to accomplish the changes set out in 1 with meetings now offering more support and development through discussion of a preaching theme at each meeting. We have set aside money in the Circuit budget for work

associated with Priorities for Action, some of which was used to support an evening at Market Place Books for Local Preachers and Leaders of Worship to explore new resources and ideas. In addition, the Rev. Les Hann has been appointed as a tutor to trainee Local Preachers and Worship Leaders making it easier for them to receive support without needing to travel outside the Circuit. However, we have yet to research and understand what expertise exists outside the Circuit that could be beneficial.

Our Actions this year will be to continue the positive steps taken above, while looking to discover and embrace resources outside the circuit, and to encourage people to consider if they are called to become a Local Preacher or Worship Leader. We currently have two people on note and one on trial. Based on the success of last years' event, we also plan to arrange another evening meeting at Market Place Books.



Priority 6: **CIRCUIT CHURCHES**

Our Strategic Intent is that circuit churches are able to:

1. Develop into healthy discipleship communities – with appropriately enabling infrastructure in terms of buildings, finances and office holders – as well as a sense of belonging to a supportive Circuit.
2. Develop the lay leadership in each local church – especially with regard to church stewards taking on much more of a directing and leading role in partnership with the minister. This enables churches to be more visionary, resilient and maintain continuity during times of change.
3. Share and act on the same Priorities for Action as the circuit – but in a way appropriate to their local context.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. To ask our Local Preachers to play a role in connecting local congregations to the Circuit by sharing Circuit news at each service they take

2. To change the format of our Circuit Meetings so that they are more inspiring, useful, accessible, and focused on business relevant to churches
3. The Ministers invest in developing local Leadership through encouragement, training and mentoring. Building a leadership team where people of different gifts and skills can work together with the minister
4. Ministers raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of Church Councils and Stewards
5. Support each church to develop its own Priorities for Action through reflection, discussion and workshops. Learn from other churches in the circuit that have already done this
6. Explore how expertise (for example finance, property, safeguarding) can be shared across churches so that they can be much more mutually supportive.

Our Conversations revealed that people do want to know what is happening around the Circuit, and to be supportive and join in when possible; some smaller churches really struggle with finance, property and safeguarding as these things become more onerous; and that there are difficulties because of ageing congregations and buildings.

Our Progress has seen Circuit Stewards concentrate on their role of connecting the Circuit with local congregations by attending local church council meetings and sharing Circuit news with them. In addition, the format of Circuit Meetings has changed to lessen the time taken for routine business items, allowing more time to discuss issues that are important to the churches. Our Mission Champion has also started discussions with churches on developing their own Priorities for Action.



However, there is still much to do in this area, so our Actions will see us continue to improve the format of Circuit Meetings, and to encourage churches to develop a form of Priorities for Action that is more meaningful and focussed for them. We will also develop a proposal for the way in which local expertise can be shared across the Circuit. A group of Stewards, both Church and Circuit, will attend a Leadership course at Capenwray in January 2019 that will help to develop capability and ideas to move these, and new initiatives, forward.



7: CIRCUIT ORGANISATION & STRUCTURE

Our Strategic Intent is that the organisation and structure of the circuit is such that it enables the other priorities to be met by individual churches acting alone; as a part of a Mission Community; and as part of the Circuit.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. To encourage local churches to work in sections which make geographical sense in terms of the emerging ecumenical Mission Communities: eg. a Kirkby Lonsdale and Cowan Bridge section; a Kent Estuary section with Levens, Milnthorpe, Storth and Arnside; and a Kendal section of Fellside, Stricklandgate and Sandylands
2. To re-organise the staff resources in line with this.

Our Conversations revealed that people want the Circuit to have more of a feel of being a community; that the Circuit meetings need to be more inspiring and relevant – and less boring; that churches sometimes feel a stronger affinity to local, non-Methodist churches than they do to other Circuit churches (although in some places the local churches are actually seen as competitors).



Our Progress has been to put in place at the beginning of the 2017/18 year an organisation that has supported the grouping of churches described above while developing closer ecumenical ties with the Anglican church through a shared role serving the Kirkby Lonsdale/Cowan Bridge churches and the Rainbow Parish. The new ministry team is working well with valuable support from the Circuit Administrator who also started at the beginning of the 2017/18 year.

Despite these changes, there are challenges ahead which must be addressed this coming year if we are to maintain momentum. Our Actions will be to work with the churches at Storth and Levens to plan and secure longer-term ministry, and to develop sustainable ministry and resources across the wider Circuit in consultation with all churches. We expect this to need significant planning for which the Circuit Stewards and the Ministry Team will be meeting several times in order to make progress.

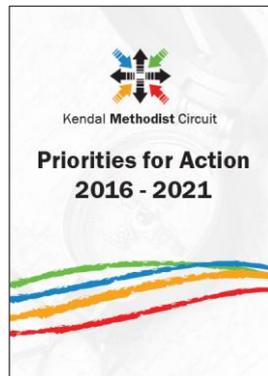


Making It Happen

It is vital that our Priorities for Action don't simply become something that we talked about a while ago, or a dusty report on a high up shelf – but that we turn them into a reality.

To enable this to happen we need to make sure that they become part of what we already do. Here are some suggestions:

- Link them to our Circuit Services
- Ask Local Preachers to lead services about prayer, discipleship and mission
- Regular Circuit prayer meetings
- Make 'Progress on the Priorities for Action' a standing item on the Circuit Leadership Team's agenda
- Review one of each of the areas in depth at each Circuit Meeting
- Review all the Priorities for Action annually as a Circuit
- Put the 'Priorities for Action' on the agenda of each local church council meeting, and encourage the local minister and the circuit steward link person to share ideas and good practice from the other churches that they are linked with.



Some Feedback

A number of churches and individuals have given feedback regarding previous versions of the Priorities for Action, and we have been able to incorporate most of this into this document which we hope will give it greater shared ownership and relevance. We view this as a living document and continue to welcome your feedback at any time.



Kendal **Methodist** Circuit

Priorities for Action

Version 7.4 Spring 2019 update

A number of images in this document came from the Kendal Circuit Website and the original Priorities for Action booklet, designed by Jonny Gios