

Kendal Methodist Circuit

Priorities for Action

Interim document

Summer 2021 – Autumn 2022

updated June 2021



Dear Friends

Over the past 15 months, Covid 19 has had a huge impact on all our lives in so many ways, including how we express our faith. Churches have been closed (or at least our buildings have) and we've had to find different ways to share, via online media or the more traditional, phone, email or letter. We've done this because of grace; the grace that says by wearing masks and keeping my distance I'm demonstrating my love for you. It's been hard when so much of what we are about is done communally, as the body of Christ.

Some have adapted to life under lockdown. Others have found the experience hugely traumatic. I'm reminded of some words of St Paul: "Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). May that be true of us as together we work out what is next for this part of God's Kingdom.

There's plenty of speculation and much uncertainty, all of which can be very disorientating, and we may feel we're stumbling in the dark. We will need to allow time to process all that has happened, maybe to remind ourselves that God is still God; that he promises to abide with us no matter what; that he has plans for us. In the words of [Captain of Israel's Host and Guide](#), we thank God for his close presence and seek his courage to face the days, months and years to come.

The song [Brother, Sister](#), reminds us, "We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load." We may travel with faith or doubt, with hope or fear. Whatever is your experience be assured that every member of the Circuit Leadership Team is committed to walk alongside you, to listen and share, support and encourage.

As part of our discernment of the way ahead, the Circuit Leadership Team have begun to amend our existing Priorities for Action to better reflect circuit life now. We've felt a need to seek God's will, rather than forge ahead full pelt and hope he catches up with us. So, over the next 6 months, we're encouraging each church community (and every member) to engage in a listening exercise; to where each person is at in their journey of faith; to where our neighbours, our communities are at and acknowledge their concerns.

As part of our shared ministry, circuit stewards will attend local church discussions to hear and feedback ways in which we might support one another. I pray that all conversations will give insights about what we've learned and what we might do differently, that God's Kingdom may be more widely known.

You may also like to keep this prayer from the Methodist Church close at hand over the next months.

*In the face of so much loss and fear
we turn to you, Loving God,
praying for comfort and strength, hope and confidence.
Be with us in the days ahead,
as we try to make sense of a new way of living
and work out how to serve this present age.*

Shalom
Rev Melanie

Rev Melanie Greenall
Superintendent Minister

Introduction – June 2021

When the Priorities for Action (PFAs) were launched in 2016 and subsequently revised in Spring 2019, we could hardly have envisaged what was to happen in March 2020 with COVID 19 sweeping the world. These have been unprecedented times when our world has been turned upside down. We are starting to emerge from the darkness to light in the knowledge that God had been with us throughout.



In the words of the President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev Richard Teal, 'we are moving from a time of disorientation' – when the world was upside down – 'to a time of reorientation' – when we seek to make sense of all that has happened and all we have experienced. We all need to take time to reconnect, recalibrate and stabilise. The Circuit is here to help, encourage and support in whatever way is needed.

As individuals we will have reacted to and experienced this time in many different ways and so we need to be sensitive to and honour these different journeys. For our churches, a new way of 'being church' has meant the move to online has happened at breakneck speed, something which would have normally happened over several years. Yet this has enabled the church to be inclusive and accessible to many who would find it difficult to walk into a church, for whatever reason. So, as we move forward, we need to be aware and seize the opportunities to continue to welcome all to our churches, whether physical or online; to develop new relationships as well as reconnect with our own church families; to share the word and love of Christ to those we meet and spend time with and continue to grow God's kingdom in this part of Cumbria.



In reassessing the PFAs, post-COVID, it is encouraging to note that the current PFAs stand as a solid foundation for our Christian life. However, it is helpful to add updates as much has changed and will change. Also, a couple of areas have been added that we will consider over the next 18 months, which will help the Circuit recalibrate and reset priorities. These updates will ensure that the PFAs continue to provide a strong and steady foundation for the work of God in the Circuit. For we are a people of God and His Kingdom will grow.

'His Kingdom lasts forever.' Daniel 7:13-14 / Rev 11:5

Some General Background

All the mainstream Christian denominations find themselves in a state of flux. Never has this been truer than the current situation as we journey through the Covid pandemic. Society and culture are 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 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 to achieve a Circuit that can:

- be more pro-active in discerning the work of God that the Methodist people are called to join in with
- 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. 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.

This document was reviewed in January 2019, providing additional commentary on the progress made between 2017 and 2019. Refinements were made as we continued to steer a course guided by changes that had taken place and based on your feedback. The six priorities became seven as Worship and Discipleship was split into two separate priorities in order to provide a better focus to each area.

In the latest revision [June 2021] each of the PFAs will be considered as to what has changed due to the pandemic and will provide suggestions going forward. New areas will be noted for further consideration over the coming months as we seek to reconnect, reignite, and encourage the work of our churches.

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 and families.** 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 review the role of 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 2021 onwards

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.



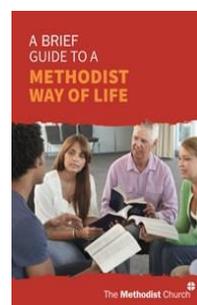
Our Progress started well with an increase in activities initiated by churches for people to engage in prayer for their communities and the wider church. The churches have been active setting up prayer groups and providing support for existing ones. There have been different services around the Circuit 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.

Update June 2021: Prayer is at the centre of all we do and are in our Christian lives. It maintains our focus on God and enables us to be open to his plans, promises and guidance. We encourage all our churches to be actively engaged in prayer – in whatever form is appropriate. Our new Circuit Prayer Champion will be encouraging us in this and will be coordinating prayer activities across the Circuit.



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.

Update June 2021: as our church buildings start to reopen and we settle to the 'new normal' we encourage everyone to be sensitive to each other, with some feeling more confident about meeting up than others. Where possible/feasible

it is intended that online/audio services continue for those unable to attend church. (see new PFA 8 – Digital Media).



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.

Update June 2021: As we emerge from lockdown small groups are to be encouraged with the intention of seeing new groups forming as we seek to reconnect with each other and God in an intentional way.



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.
3. To explore the repurposing of the building that housed Milnthorpe Methodist Church.

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. In Milnthorpe we have M:HUB which acts as a community centre and a base for mission.

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.

Update June 2021: churches are encouraged to revisit/re-evaluate/reconsider their areas of mission. As individuals we've had time to reconsider our commitment to activities, for some that may mean laying things down so as churches we must give time and space for this to happen. Then, as we go forward, we do so with renewed vigour, enthusiasm and commitment. We will continue to invest in M:HUB and explore its potential for outreach and mission work.



Follow Daily **Care Deeply**
Speak Boldly **Tread Gently**



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. Based on the success of last years' event, we also plan to arrange another evening meeting at Market Place Books.

Update June 2021: we will all be encouraged to consider our calling with taster sessions organised for those who feel they may like to explore being a Local Preacher or Worship Leader.



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 will enable 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 Capernwray in January 2019 that will help to develop capability and ideas to move these, and new initiatives, forward.

Update June 2021: The CLT recognises the need for our churches to have time and space to regroup, reconnect and recalibrate as we start to reopen. We will monitor how churches are managing reopening. As church priorities and those of individuals change, the Circuit is here to support in whatever shape or form required.



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: e.g. 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.
3. To review the post of Circuit Administrator so that it offers not just general administrative support but also work to help the Circuit in achieving its Priorities for Action.

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.

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.

Update June 2021: our continued priority for the Circuit organisation and structure is that local churches will continue to work in sections which make geographical sense in terms of emerging ecumenical communities, and that each section is sustainably resourced and staffed.

Priorities for further development following consultation



8: DIGITAL MEDIA

Our Strategic Intent is to make our activities available in more than one medium so more people can feel connected and included. Using digital and other media to increase inclusivity and accessibility will include not only Sunday worship, but also prayer and discipleship groups as well as business meetings. We will seek to identify any mission opportunities that arise from this.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

Develop capacity and resources in each section to enable and encourage churches to be able to do this or start to do this so they can reach their congregation and community.



9: ENVIRONMENTAL

Our Strategic Intent is to be intentionally considering the environmental impact and sustainability of our buildings and activities, going forward.

Our Method of Achievement will be:

1. To reflect on the amount of travel we traditionally did, but don't currently do, because we've used Zoom instead. There may well be some meetings that can continue on Zoom.
2. To encourage energy audits for all circuit and church properties leading to an action plan for each.



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 8.5 Interim document
Summer 2021 to autumn 2022

A number of images in this document came from the Kendal Circuit Website and the original Priorities for Action booklet, designed by Jonny Gios.
Digital Media image - NordWood Themes, on Unsplash