

Dear Church Members,

Greetings at the beginning of a new Methodist year and thank you for all your hard work on behalf of the Circuit.

The Circuit Leadership Team are very grateful to all the churches who have engaged in the recent conversations about the future shape of the circuit. There is broad agreement that things cannot go on as they are and that the way that the circuit is organized is no longer sustainable in the medium to long term. We have a declining membership, older congregations and fewer people willing to take on the jobs that need to be done to keep our buildings open and safe. These are the challenges that we face. This could paint a bleak picture but there is a lot of exciting work going on as well with lives touched by the good news of the love of Christ and nurtured in faith.

At these moments, it is good to be reminded of our priorities and vision which we set ourselves as a circuit:

- Access to high quality worship and teaching that is relevant to those we seek to share the gospel with
- Creative community engagement with appropriate partners
- Transforming lives through discipleship
- Strategic use of buildings and people

### **Conversation and Change**

Sometimes I know it can feel that there is a lot of conversation and nothing seems to happen which can be frustrating. I would like to assure you that across the circuit there is a great deal going on! Things might not be happening as fast as we would like but building relationships takes time. Sometimes the steps we are taking seem very small, but they are all significant as we seek to reshape the circuit to meet the needs of the current age. Change I have observed is also much easier if it involves someone else's church, however I have been touched and moved by some of the stories that have come out of the conversations around the circuit of churches willing to take some big steps in faith, stepping out into the unknown but trusting in God to lead them. Sometimes people say to me – just tell us what to do that's what the Superintendent is for! My experience is that Methodist people don't respond well to be told what to do (neither do I!), we work best when we journey together discerning God's will. We know that the time is coming when hard decisions will need to be made about where we put our resources but I believe, if we have worshipped together, studied God's word together and prayed together, we will be better equipped to make these decisions together.

Since Methodist Conference met in June our circuit conversations have been given a new focus with every Church Council being asked to address annually the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?' The implication of the Notice of Motion is that we should not be using our resources to keep churches open that have no vision for mission.

The 2017 Methodist Conference has also called upon local churches to start the new Methodist year with a day of prayer and fasting to recognise the challenges facing communities and the urgent call to share God's love in word and action. Please join me to mark the beginning of the new year with prayer and fasting on September 1st.

### **Changes in Presbytral Ministry**

In September 2017, there will be with 3.66 presbyters having pastoral charge for the 11 churches in the circuit. Rev Peter Hughes is moving to Liverpool South and Jan is working 0.33 of her time at the Southport and Ormskirk NHS Hospital Trust. Last year the full-time vicar left St Philip and St Paul with Wesley and has not been replaced and although there has been an appointment of a Local Missional Leader this has had a significant impact on my time. I am grateful to my presbytral colleagues for their willingness to respond to these changes but also aware of the additional pressures this will put on them. We all take on new responsibilities in the next few months and these will take time to bed in and I ask for your understanding as we get to know new ways of working.

Presbyter in Pastoral Charge:

Marie-Anne: St Philip and St Paul with Wesley LEP  
St Francis of Assisi LEP  
Victoria  
(Lord Street West United Church LEP)

Jan: Marshside Road  
Crossens

Patrick: Liverpool Road  
Ainsdale  
Bescar Lane

Michael: Russell Road  
Leyland Road

All these changes in pastoral charge will be recognized at the circuit service at Lord Street West on Sunday 17th September at 6pm, when we will also welcome Nigel Mawdsley as the new Lay Employee appointed to Lord Street West United Church.

### **Future Plans**

We don't want to become so absorbed in our own structures that we cease to be kingdom focused. There is much to give thanks to God for including the establishment of a new charity for Christian's Against Poverty, our involvement in the Foodbank, Street Pastors, The Living Room and so much more across Southport.

There are two particular initiatives I want to commend to you and your prayers; Holy Habits and Hope 2018.

We are hoping that in the summer of 2018 to be able to launch 'Holy Habits' working with our ecumenical partners to look at the material coming out of the Birmingham District which explores discipleship through ten early church disciplines or habits. Please get hold of the book Holy Habits written by Andrew Roberts – beg or borrow it from a Local Preacher they were all given one for Christmas!

We are also planning to be part of Hope 2018 a nationwide initiative which seeks to see the churches showing Jesus' love and telling the Jesus story in every community. Wouldn't it be great if we could mobilize the Methodist people for three events in 2018 that have a real impact on our town to show them the love of Jesus! This will form part of our conversation at our circuit meeting in September. The Hope handbook is full ideas and for more information you can go to [www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk).

Finally, having reflected on what is going on around the circuit the leadership team is bringing ten recommendations about our direction of travel to the Circuit Meeting.

1. The District Evangelism Enabler is approached to work within the circuit.
2. Churches are encouraged to continue with conversation with their ecumenical partners.
3. Churches are encouraged to continue to talk with their local Methodist Churches and to only do separately what needs to be done separately.
4. The Circuit explores employing appropriate Lay Employees to support key work across the circuit
5. The Circuit reviews the provision of worship across the plan.
6. The presbyters are encouraged to explore how we might work more closely as a team with presbyters having specific responsibilities for areas of church life.
7. The Circuit to continue to organize monthly circuit prayer meetings which rotate around the circuit churches to encourage fellowship and prayer. To explore doing Advent/Lent Bible Studies in hubs or circuit wide.
8. To work towards regular morning worship in hubs across the circuit
9. Commit to studying Holy Habits together launching in summer 2018 alongside our ecumenical partners if possible.
10. Commit to doing three Hope activities across Southport in 2018.

Here is a short overview of the conversation from the circuit churches

### **Lord Street West United Church**

Lord Street West according to their constitution has an alternating ministry therefore we are working closely with the URC District Moderator to put in place appropriate ministerial oversight. Lord Street West is already part of the team ministry which covers the Southport and Formby area. Peter Hughes and I have been having regular meetings with Rev Janet Calderley and Rev Peter Lyth the URC team ministers. We anticipate working closely with them in the future and they have asked that they should be accorded Authorized to Serve status which we are pursuing. We hold Lord Street West in our prayers as they lose Peter and Emma over the summer and are mourning the loss of one of their key lay leaders Hilary Jackson.

## **Bescar Lane**

Bescar Lane have been working closely with their ecumenical partners for many years and are now interested in exploring how to take this forward with St. Mark's, Scarisbrick. They are planning on having more regular joint services and doing youth and children's work together. This is all very exciting and Patrick and I have had a very positive meeting with Rev Eileen Heaney, the vicar of St Mark's.

## **Liverpool Road**

Liverpool Road are having conversations with St John's, Birkdale, looking at their mission and ministry to their neighbourhood and what they could possibly do together in the future. Alongside these conversations Liverpool Road and Ainsdale are exploring how they might work together. The challenge here are the buildings and ensuring that they do not become a burden.

## **Ainsdale**

Ainsdale are in conversation with St John's Ainsdale about how their work more closely together with an awareness that their work in the school and at Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure are complimentary areas of mission. Alongside these conversations Ainsdale and Liverpool Road are exploring how they might work together.

## **Leyland Road**

Leyland Road are committed to mission and there is a lot going on in the buildings for all ages. Their challenge is to ensure that they are financially viable in the years to come.

## **St Philip and St Paul with Wesley**

St Philip and St Paul with Wesley (PPW) are learning to work in a new way with the departure of Rev. Richard Gibbs at Easter 2016 and no plans to appoint a new vicar. Rachel Bray was appointed as Local Missional Leader in November 2016, which is a voluntary part time appointment. The Church has close links with the Church of England school next door. PPW are part of the central area partnership in the North Meols Deanery and are seeking ways to work more closely with them.

## **St Francis of Assisi**

The congregation at St Francis is small but faithful. The Church is keen to have an alternative worship service in the church e.g. messy church but are aware that they are unable to run it themselves. This is being explored within the Deanery Central Partnership as part of the response to the new housing in Kew.

## **Russell Road**

Another small but faithful congregation Russell Road is at the heart of one of the most deprived wards in Sefton. The building has huge potential but the congregation like many of us, are feeling a little tired.

## **Crossens**

Crossens are aware that the maintenance of buildings built for a different time is not a legacy they want to leave for the next generation and so the Church Council has made the decision to explore alternative premises for worship. The congregation is keen to be able to continue to serve the community with the midweek lunch club and their popular brunches.

## **Marshside Road**

Marshside Road is blessed with a well-used church building, but its configuration means that it is not easy to manage and the church itself is only used once a week for worship. They are exploring how they could create a space that fitted their current needs better and supported their work amongst children and young people with special needs and their families.

## **Victoria**

The congregation has expressed their willingness to do things differently and to work more closely with a number of churches across the town. How could the modern flexible premises be better used by the circuit?

Finally, I am grateful to the Circuit Stewards who work hard behind the scenes making things happen. I ask you to remember us all in your prayers.

Yours,

**Marie-Anne**