

35. Larger than Circuit

Contact Name and Details	Susan Howdle Chair, Larger than Circuit Working Party SRHowdle@ukgateway.net
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Summary of Content and Impact

Subject and Aims	This report offers the Conference a full outline of the work of the Methodist Council Working Party, that was established 'to oversee the process(es) by which the <i>Regrouping for Mission</i> initiative proceeded in respect of 'larger than circuit' entities', and proposes a way forward.
Main Points	<p>A. Report and main proposals</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>A constitutional perspective</p> <p>A review of a changing context for districts: why now?</p> <p>Larger than Circuit: why anything?</p> <p>Some common themes</p> <p>The proposal</p> <p>B. What flows from the proposal?</p>
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The <i>Larger than Circuit</i> Working Party Methodist Council Report in March 2012 – MC 12/37, January 2013 – MC 13/11 April 2013 – MC13/34
Consultations	The Ministries Committee, The Chairs' Meeting, Connexional Leaders' Forum, District Development Enablers, various district groups upon invitation (Appendix 2 provides a more comprehensive list).
Impact	This could have a high impact upon district and circuit life, depending upon consultations and outcomes.
Risk	Risk of proceeding: requirement of considerable time and energy; emergence of 'piecemeal' solutions. Risk of not proceeding: continuing concerns as to 'sustainability' and its impact on mission.

PART A – THE REPORT AND MAIN PROPOSAL

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

1. The Report of the (then) General Secretary to the 2007 Conference launched *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission*, a process of circuit review, refocusing and realignment supported by District Development Enablers (DDEs). The report concluded by reflecting on the impact of this process on districts and indicated that, “in five years’ time or so, the Conference will be invited by the Council radically to review the district pattern and structures, to discern what is needed for the following decades.”¹ However, it also envisaged that some review and development of district patterns and structures would take place during this time and encouraged “ongoing cross-district co-operation and sharing of resources wherever possible”.²
2. Over the ensuing years a number of cross-district discussions have been taking place across the connexion, both formally and informally, as detailed below, not least the report of the North West Districts Review Group which was brought to the 2011 Conference. It was in this context that the Methodist Council decided to bring forward a review of district patterns and structures and accordingly appointed a working party to undertake this work.

‘Larger than Circuit’ Working Party

3. The constitution for the working party was agreed by the Methodist Council in January 2011 (MC/11/10) and the following were appointed (nature of representation shown in brackets): Deacon Eunice Attwood (Connexional Leaders’ Forum); the Revd Ian Bell (Fresh Ways Working Group); Rachael Fletcher (Strategy and Resources Committee); the Revd Carla Hall (Methodist Council); Susan Howdle (Law & Polity Committee); the Revd Rodney Hill (North West Districts Review Group); Rachel McCallam (DDE); Doug Swanney or Siôn Rhys Evans (Connexional Team); the Revd Dr Andrew Wood (Ministries Committee); the Revd Dr Mark Wakelin (the General Secretary’s designate). The group was supported by Paul Taylor (Connexional Team).
4. Subsequently, Susan Howdle became the chair of the working party, as a result of the Revd Dr Mark Wakelin’s designation as President of the Conference, and the working party was joined by two further District Chairs: the Revd Loraine Mellor (Nottingham and Derby) and the Revd David Hinchliffe (Channel Islands). Siôn Rhys Evans ceased to be a member of the working party upon his resignation from the Connexional Team in January 2013.

Purpose and process

5. The working party was established to “oversee the process(es) by which the *Regrouping for Mission* initiative proceeded in respect of ‘larger than circuit’ entities.”³ The phrase ‘larger than circuit’ is explored further below, but effectively it is being used to refer to that area of life (its activities and related bodies and office-holders) which operates in a broader context than the circuit but not on a connexion-wide basis.
6. The working party has met ten times. It has reviewed a large number of relevant Conference and Council reports, the notes from a number of circuit and district *Regrouping for Mission*

¹ General Secretary’s Report, Conference Agenda 2007, p. 21, para. 9.1.

² *Ibid*, para. 9.2

³ Methodist Council paper MC/11/10, January 2011

consultations and a variety of other papers, created as part of the *Regrouping for Mission* process. These reports, notes and papers are listed in Appendix 1. The working party has had the benefit of discussions with a variety of people involved, both at its own meetings and where members have been pleased to be invited to a number of meetings of a connexional, regional or district nature; these are listed in Appendix 2. In particular, the chair of the working party has been grateful for the opportunity to take part in discussions at several meetings of the Chairs' Meeting and the Connexional Leaders' Forum, where the direction of travel was broadly welcomed. As directed by the Conference of 2012, the working party has also sought to work in conjunction with those responsible for the implementation of the proposals in *The Fruitful Field* about the creation of a learning Network based upon a regional model. Finally, the working party has reported on three occasions to the Methodist Council. Most recently, a full report was brought to the April 2013 Council, substantially as it appears below.

7. It may be helpful to indicate the general shape of this report. Part A, after this introductory section, begins by providing an overview of the present formal place of districts within our polity. It is important to understand this constitutional perspective in order to root any future developments within an understanding of our tradition, and in order to understand the degree of constraint and flexibility which our polity permits in this regard. The report then explores the changing context in which districts now operate, leading to the perceived need for this review. It explores the reasons for some 'larger than circuit' provision continuing to be made in our structures. It then sets out some of the common themes which have emerged in consultations. This leads to the basic proposal for a two-year connexion-wide process of exploration and report. Part B deals with some of the points which need to be addressed if the basic proposal is accepted.
8. The April 2013 Methodist Council directed that Part A (with such minor amendments as were to be approved by three Council members) be brought to the Conference in its name with the recommendation that the Conference adopt the basic proposal contained in paragraph 85. The Council also adopted some, but not all, of the proposals in Part B of the working party's report, and this final version of Part B below reflects those decisions.

SECTION 2 A CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

9. Reference was made above to the importance of an understanding of our tradition. Any work of this kind needs to be underpinned by the theological foundations which have already been laid by the Conference in the adoption of certain key reports, and particularly the Conference Statement on the Church, *Called to Love and Praise*.⁴
10. In that report, one distinctive emphasis of Methodist ecclesiology identifies 'relatedness' as it finds expression in the 'connexional principle' as enshrining a vital truth about the nature of the Church, witnessing to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God, and reflected in New Testament teaching and practice.

"How is this 'connexional principle' effected? First, at all levels of the Church, the structures of fellowship, consultation, government and oversight express the interdependence of all churches, and help to point up, at all levels, necessary priorities in mission and service. Second, alongside this, as the natural corollary of connexionalism,

⁴ Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 1999. A 'Conference Statement' is one which, after due consultation, has been adopted by the Conference as "a considered Statement of the judgment of the Conference on some major issue of faith and practice, and framed with a view to standing as such for some years" (SO 129(1))

local churches, Circuits and Districts exercise the greatest possible degree of autonomy. This is necessary if they are to express their own cultural identity and to respond to local calls of mission and service in an appropriate way. But their dependence on the larger whole is also necessary for their own continuing vitality and well-being. Such local autonomy may also need to be limited from time to time in the light of the needs of the whole Church.”⁵

11. If we then turn to a consideration of our foundational rules, as expressed in the Deed of Union and the Standing Orders based upon them, we see that they both inform and are informed by this description of our self-understanding as a church.
12. It should be stressed at the outset that in this section districts are considered, not primarily from the angle of ‘life as we know it’ but from the constitutional perspective: what provisions appear in the rules? What would need to be changed or removed if there was a different pattern? It should also be stressed that there is no provision here which could not legally be changed (although any changes to the Deed of Union would require the ‘special resolution’ procedure⁶).

The development of districts

13. The grouping of circuits into districts with Chairmen dates from the period immediately after John Wesley’s death. The development was intended to provide a means for dealing with problems, disputes and disciplinary matters, and for offering support and advice to the Circuit Assistants [Superintendents] between meetings of the Conference. Gradually the ‘District Committee’ or ‘District Meeting’ [later, Synod], became a significant part of connexional life. Organisation into districts continued into the various Methodist traditions and at Methodist Union in 1932 the connexion consisted of 46 districts in the home work and 36 overseas.
14. A later review of the role of District Chairman [now Chair], with increased emphasis on their being a ‘District Missioner’ as well as pastor to the ministers, led to the decision that in most cases they needed to be ‘separated’, ie not to hold a circuit appointment. To enable this to be afforded, in 1957 the number of home districts was reduced to 34, on the basis of roughly 30,000 members per separated Chairman.
15. There are now 31 home (and no overseas) districts, many with largely the same configuration as in 1957. All but four have separated Chairs. Three of those four operate as single circuit districts.
16. Since 2006, co-Chairs can be appointed; currently London has three. Also in 2006, the possibility of appointing a permanent deputy Chair for a district was put on a more formal basis, together with provisions for appointing temporary deputies and assistants to Chairs (SO 426). A range of patterns of leadership has therefore emerged.

The basis and purpose of districts

17. Do we currently have to have districts? Yes, we do. Clause 38 of the Deed of Union contains the basic provision:

The Local Churches in Great Britain, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, Malta and Gibraltar forming part of the Methodist Church shall be formed into Circuits for mutual

⁵ *Ibid* para. 4.6.2

⁶ ie a 75% majority at two successive Conferences, with appropriate consultation (no doubt with the districts) during the intervening year.

encouragement and help (especially in meeting their financial obligations) in accordance with directions from time to time made by the Conference, and the Circuits shall be arranged by the Conference in Districts in like manner, but the Conference shall not direct the division or combination of existing Circuits or Districts or the formation of new Circuits unless and until the Synod or Synods of the District or Districts involved have been consulted.

18. Note that the concepts here are not primarily territorial, boundary-based. They reflect a relational, indeed 'connexional', approach.
19. Although there is some indication within Clause 38 of the Deed of Union of the purpose of circuits, any explicit reference to the purpose of districts only appears in Standing Orders, in particular SO 400A(1):

The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns. The District serves the Local Churches and Circuits and the Conference in the support, deployment and oversight of the various ministries of the Church, and in programmes of training. It has responsibility for the evaluation of applications by Local Churches and Circuits for approval of or consent to their proposals, when required, or for assistance from district or connexional bodies or funds. Wherever possible the work of the District is carried out ecumenically. The District is thus an expression, over a wider geographical area than the Circuit, of the connexional character of the Church.

The basis and purpose of Synods

20. Similarly, whilst proceeding on the basis that the Synod is to be constituted as the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of a district (clause 1(xxxiv) and 40), the Deed of Union does not, with one significant exception below, elaborate on what it is to do. SO 412(1) does this:

Subject in Wales to Standing Order 491 the Synod is the policy-making court of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and the Connexional Team on the one hand and the Circuits and Local Churches on the other. It shall have oversight of all district affairs. It shall formulate and promote policies, through its various officers and committees, to assist the mission of the Church, to give inspiration to the leaders in the circuits and to ensure the interrelation of all aspects of the Church's life throughout the District. It is a forum in which issues of public concern relevant to the witness of the Church may be addressed. The Synod's business is the work of God in the District, expressed in worship, conversation, formal business, the communication of Conference matters to the Circuits and the submission of memorials to the Conference.

21. There is also the important provision for the Presbyteral Session of the Synod, in SO 481(1):

The members of the Presbyteral Session meet to recall and reflect upon their ministerial vocation, to watch over one another in love, to make recommendations to the Conference concerning presbyteral probationers and to consider the work of God in the District ...

22. Finally, the one significant aspect in the Deed of Union about what the Synods do is the provision in clause 14 that the membership of the Conference itself consists of representatives who, apart from certain specified categories, are all to be elected by the Synods.

The role of District Chairs

23. The Deed of Union lays down in some detail the provisions for the appointment of District Chairs (clause 42), making clear the connexional nature of this appointment, which is reinforced by their inclusion in the membership of the Conference (clause 14). Again it is the Standing Order (SO 424) which offers a general description of the Chair's responsibilities:

(1) The prime duty of a Chair is to further the work of God in the District; to this end he or she will use all the gifts and graces he or she has received, being especially diligent to be a pastor to the ministers and probationers and to lead all the people of the District in the work of preaching and worship, evangelism, pastoral care, teaching and administration.

(2) The Chair, in conjunction with the members of the Synod in its respective sessions, shall be responsible to the Conference for the observance within the District of Methodist order and discipline.

(3) It is the duty of the Chair to exercise oversight of the character and fidelity of the presbyters and presbyteral probationers in the District.

Exercising functions and responsibilities

24. Obviously, there are many more Standing Orders which, over the years, have provided for how these various functions and responsibilities are to be exercised. (Although there is now provision in Section 48A for a district to adopt a 'modified constitution', there are limits to this flexibility, and it would appear that not much use has yet been made of this provision.) Some aspects of these Standing Orders are identified in the following paragraphs. This is not an exhaustive list, but illustrates the range of constitutional areas which need to be considered during any future developments.

Some district functions and responsibilities

25. The checklist for meetings of the District Policy Committee (in CPD Book VII, Part 6) best indicates the wide range of functions now exercised under the aegis of the district – financial, ecumenical, lay employment, city centre work, chaplaincies, formal education, manses.
26. There are also the significant district functions relating to presbyteral candidates and probationers.
27. In two particular aspects the district has assumed a much greater role in recent years: the giving of consents to property projects and the significant grant-making powers through the District Advance Fund.

Some functions and responsibilities of District Chairs

28. District Chairs have an increasingly complex range of responsibilities. The *Conference-facing* nature of the District Chair's office is reflected in membership of various bodies, including the Conference itself and the Connexional Leaders' Forum. There are also the key responsibilities laid upon the Chair in upholding Methodist discipline and good order, including, for example, powers of suspension. At the same time, there is the *circuit-facing* aspect: the ministry of 'visitation' and supervision and support of Superintendents (SO 425).

29. Straddling the two is the aspect perhaps least spelt out in Standing Orders but of great significance: the Chair's pivotal role, in partnership with the Lay Stationing Representative, in the stationing 'matching' process.
30. This last instance is one example of the changing patterns of leadership, referred to above, within which these functions and responsibilities now operate, through various forms of collaborative ministry within the District.

SECTION 3 A REVIEW OF A CHANGING CONTEXT FOR DISTRICTS: WHY NOW?

31. One of the points which a report such as this has to address is whether there is a need to review the current district system at all. There is a wide range of views about this, from those who see this as something long overdue and who question why it is taking so long to carry out, to those who see no need for any such review because the system is working well where they are.
32. There is undoubtedly room for a wide spectrum of views as to what the conclusion of any such review might be, from the varying experience of those involved. But the Methodist Council in appointing the working party took the view, which it has now affirmed, that many factors point towards embarking upon a consideration of the issues, and some of those factors are explored here.
33. First, though, an introductory comment. The issue has, for a number of years, been expressed quite simply thus: "we cannot sustain thirty-one districts for very long." "Sustainability" is a concept capable of various interpretations. The working party's work has not been based upon a single understanding of sustainability, financial or otherwise, as a key driver for change, but in this section aspects of the 'sustainability' issue will naturally emerge, and the section concludes by gathering together some key points.
34. To return, then, to exploring the context for this review, it is relevant to take both a longer term view and also one more directly related to recent connexional developments.
35. What are **the long term trends** which have brought about a very different picture from that of the mid-1950s when our current system largely took shape?
36. First, the demographic picture cannot be ignored. As indicated above, the present configuration was based largely upon an assumption that a membership of around 30,000 was the appropriate size to sustain the life of the district and an effective exercise of the Chair's ministry. The reduction in membership and the change in the age profile of that membership, together with the reduction in the number of ministers in circuit appointments, need not be laboured here. We include in Appendix 3 a table which includes the current membership figures, and the comparative total figure for 1957. Obviously membership figures do not tell the whole story but the working party took the view that it was at least a relevant indicator in providing a comparison between the two dates.
37. Then, whilst it would be a great exaggeration to suggest that in the middle of the last century the typical Methodist member was fully aware of and involved in the life of the district, a constant theme today is the sense that our local churches are increasingly 'congregational' in nature, with even the Circuit being regarded as an unfamiliar, sometimes intrusive, entity.
38. At the same time growing formal and informal ecumenical activity, whether locally or on a wider basis, has led to natural links being formed which were unthought-of in previous

generations. In some parts of the connexion, these are seen to create groupings which are more appropriate and effective in missional terms than the traditional Methodist links.

39. Meanwhile, patterns of leadership have changed in many ways, not least the expectation of more collaborative working, as referred to above. This is seen in the more explicit partnership of ordained and lay ministry in the life of the Church, for instance through the involvement of lay people in the stationing process and the formation of district leadership teams, and also in the way that in various districts the appointment of Co-chairs, or Deputy or Assistant Chairs, has been found helpful. A further element is the increasing use of a mix of people working on a voluntary and paid basis (as amplified below).
40. These evolving patterns of leadership are closely bound up with the changing nature of the Chair's role. Despite the missional emphasis in the 1950s reports, increasing demands and expectations have developed in other directions, created both by the Church and by societal changes. The need for the exercise of proper authority and oversight has, if anything, increased, so as to try to ensure responsible and appropriate conduct by all those involved in Church life, particularly where that conduct affects people (whether in the Church or not) who are nowadays far more likely to challenge instances of bad practice than in the past. But at the same time there is often an erosion of respect for authority and a lack of understanding of the need for such oversight. As a result, District Chairs are frequently describing their role, so far as the district is concerned, as predominantly one of 'fire-fighting'. Alongside these demands come those arising from stationing shortages over a number of years: many so-called separated Chairs are carrying the responsibility of superintendency of one or more circuits for much of the time, whilst the non-separated Chairs already serve as Superintendents and have pastoral charge of local churches.
41. At the same time as having these different district roles, the Chairs are connexional leaders, and there is a more explicit recognition of this leadership being exercised collegially through the regular Chairs' Meetings, stationing matching meetings and membership of the Connexional Leaders' Forum.
42. Against that background, this report now turns to some of the **more recent developments** which have created new and emerging challenges.

a. Increased areas of responsibility

43. Certain functions which would previously have been dealt with by connexional bodies and staff have been devolved, on the principle of subsidiarity. These include the giving of consents for property projects, and the making of grants from District Advance Funds (largely created from levies retained from what would otherwise go to the Connexional Priority Fund for grant-making on a connexion-wide basis).
44. Coupled with this are the various areas in which the Conference has judged that, because of their crucial significance in ensuring compliance with legal requirements and best practice, the district should play a key part in providing training and support. So, for instance, there are significant responsibilities for lay employment within the district and for safeguarding functions.
45. These factors combine to increase the pressure on districts to find personnel to discharge these mandatory functions, let alone to fill the other roles which the district needs in order to support its primary purposes. In many districts the way forward has been to support this work (other than for the roles which are connexionally funded ie DDEs and Training Officers) by 'buying in', through either direct employment or consultancy, people with the appropriate gifts and expertise, whether in direct involvement in taking forward the mission strategy of

the district or in the functions supporting this eg administration, finance, property, human resources.

46. One of the implications of these changes, for a connexional church, is that districts have responded to these challenges in quite different and divergent ways – often related to their financial ability to support paid staffing, depending on the size of their District Advance Funds. This raises questions both about the nature and character of our connexional life, returned to below, but also about the means of sharing good practice between districts and reflecting together on different ways of working in order to nurture best practice across the connexion.

b. A sense of identity

47. Despite what was said above about the lack of district awareness more generally in the connexion, it would be true to say that there is perhaps an increased sense of identity and focus amongst those who are actually involved in district life. The reports the working party receives - of district strategy documents, district reviews, district-wide inspirational events - indicate that there is in many places a developing awareness of the key role which the district can play in enabling local churches and circuits to fulfil their calling to mission.

c. Working with other Districts

48. Alongside this focus upon the role and strategy of the district, there is the increasing practice for districts not to 'go it alone', but to work with neighbouring districts in making key appointments, some of which are described below. Where necessary, this has been encouraged by Standing Orders permitting, for instance, the joint appointment of Reconciliation and Support Groups for the complaints and discipline processes.
49. In some aspects, the need not to 'go it alone' has been recognised and actually become formalised over the years onto a regional basis. The grouping of districts in stationing regions dates back over many years, and has become increasingly significant in the stationing process. The current regional training networks, each with its forum, are a more recent example, and now we have the proposed regional groupings for the emerging Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network. It should be said that greater value has been placed on regionalism in some parts of the connexion than others. Some regional groupings of districts have been able for various reasons to develop more effective ways of working together than others, for instance the covenant relationship which came about as a result of the North West Districts' Review Group⁷.

d. Regrouping for Mission

50. As was explained at the outset, this report has its genesis in the process of *Regrouping for Mission* which, within and across our circuits over recent years, has amounted to an intense period of engagement with the patterns and structures of church life and significant change. Key reflections from the work of *Regrouping for Mission* include the importance of having a clear understanding of the aims and purposes of the patterns and structures of church life, and the importance of being willing to change these patterns and structures if existing patterns and structures no longer match our aims and purposes.

⁷ Note that although the review refers to the 'North West Districts', the report encompassed also the Isle of Man as well as the districts in the North West of England, ie Bolton & Rochdale, Chester & Stoke-on-Trent, Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester & Stockport.

51. It was always envisaged that the process would raise significant questions for districts. Initially these were about how to facilitate and support the circuits in their development, and a focused and funded role to support and encourage this process of change (ie through District Development Enablers (DDEs)) was offered. Now, the issues are about the challenges being experienced by circuits which have been substantially reconfigured. Not surprisingly, questions arise as to how a district's structures and functions can appropriately support the increased variety of types of circuit, from those which are and are likely to remain small to those which contain very large numbers of churches and ministers spread over a wide geographical area. But these reconfigured circuits also offer some very helpful thinking which we do well to remember: the fact that often they require some form of sub-grouping of local churches, into eg sections or mission areas, means that work is done at the most appropriate level, based not on formal structures but upon relationships – a truly connexional approach.

e. Belonging together

52. Going deeper than the organisational developments just described, there is a more profound question.
53. It is perhaps posed more acutely when we look at two more obviously diverse groupings within the church. First, how do we 'belong together' and reflect the aspirations and connexional understanding of Methodist congregations in our midst whose first language is not English and whose church culture developed elsewhere in the world Methodist family? And secondly, how do we relate our traditional ways of ordering our life to the abundant growth of ventures such as Fresh Expressions or VentureFX activity?
54. However, it is a question for the whole church. As explained above, and implicit in this whole report, in its explorations the working party has worked within the ecclesiological understandings about connexionalism expressed in the various major reports brought to the Conference over recent years and most particularly the foundational document *Called to Love and Praise*. There is another important strand which that document also identifies in Methodist ecclesiology: "the conviction that the Church should be structured for mission, and able to respond pragmatically, when new needs or opportunities arise".⁸ Or, as the present General Secretary expressed it in his report to the Conference in 2011: "We are a connexional Church and from time to time we revisit how we embody and expound the nature of our connexionalism."⁹
55. Some of the trends described in this part of the report lead the group to welcome the suggestion that the time has come to explore more fully what it means to be an authentically connexional church in the twenty first century.
56. Looking at the whole picture then, these are some of the developments which lead to the conclusion that the time is due, if not overdue, for a review of our current district structures.
57. As indicated above, this section now concludes by returning to some key points which have emerged about "sustainability".

⁸ *Ibid.* para. 4.7.1

⁹ General Secretary's Report: *Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission*, Conference Agenda 2011, p. 29, para. 18,

Sustainability

Introduction

58. What do people mean when they say that our current structure of districts is unsustainable? This could be seen as simply a narrow financial issue – that we are reaching a point where the costs exceed the capacity of those whose giving supports the circuit assessment (out of which the district is sustained). But in the present context it is usually intended to mean something broader than that: that the system cannot continue as it is, or at least should not, because it is not ‘fit for purpose’, in supporting the Church to fulfil its calling. What is implied is that the demands being made upon the resources of time and energy and commitment of people who are involved in (currently) district-based activities are too great to be met, or at least are disproportionate – diverting too much from the primary focus and locus of mission in the circuit and local church.
59. The narrow and broader aspects cannot be separated though. If we ask what seems to be a fairly simple question, ‘how much money do districts cost?’, the response of ‘well, it depends what you mean by ...’ is not an attempt at evasion or obfuscation.

‘Core costs’

60. It is possible to elicit from the annual accounts of the districts and the Methodist Church Fund certain ‘core figures’ for the connexion as a whole. ‘Core figures’ is not a term of art, but used here to provide some indicative costs.

Note:

- when we speak below of costs which are borne by the Methodist Church Fund, it hardly needs emphasising that generally the money which is available for this purpose has been raised via the circuit assessment in the first place;
- it needs to be remembered that there are districts where there are ‘non-separated’ District Chairs who also have a circuit appointment. The costs of these Chairs’ stipends fall almost entirely upon the relevant circuit and district;
- in some districts there are other presbyters who are undertaking some of the Chair’s duties, as deputy or assistant Chairs, whilst being appointed primarily to a circuit. The stipend attributable to the district role does not appear here but is referred to in paragraph 66 below.

We might include in these core figures:

District Chairs’ stipends	Methodist Church Fund	1,050,000
Costs related to district manses [no account is here being taken of the loss of any revenue on capital tied up in the manses]	District	205,000
Cost of staff funded by the district (ie not Chair, DDE, TO)	District	1,125,000
Accommodation and travel expenses for District Chairs in relation to Chairs’ Meetings, CLF, Conference	Methodist Church Fund	65,000
Administration and travel costs for district	District	625,000

61. There is one important comment to be made at this point. Sometimes the throw-away line is heard that we could save £x on the connexional and district budgets if we had no, or a

reduced number of, District Chairs. Even in financial terms this is not so simple. We are talking about a group of presbyters in Full Connexion, hence in the covenant relationship with the Conference which imports a responsibility on the Conference's part for their continued support, not least their stipend and housing. For the connexion as a whole, therefore, there would only be the marginal cost of the District Chairs' extra allowance over, say, that of the Superintendent.

62. But looked at in much more meaningful terms, the main body of this report points out the wide range of responsibilities which lie on District Chairs. These are not, in the main, 'optional extras'. A group of gifted and experienced people would continue to be needed to deal with many of the difficult corporate and personal issues that arise and to offer connexional leadership in many different ways. Or, to put it another way, without them what would be the risk of increased connexional costs in dealing at a later stage with the aftermath of such situations? There may, of course, be a balance to be struck about how many of them should be set apart for this task, in relation to the equally significant needs of filling key circuit appointments, and that perhaps raises a different type of sustainability issue.

Paid and voluntary staff

63. Here we return to the link between finance and wider questions of sustainability. Several trends have been at work in recent years, as explored above, and these are drawn together here.
64. Reference has already been made to the increased role for districts, in order to achieve greater subsidiarity, and to ensure that important legal and compliance issues are dealt with. This has put pressure on resources in terms of finding people with the necessary time and skills for certain roles. Whilst in some places there have been people willing and able to fulfil these functions voluntarily, that is decreasingly so. In some instances, the district has decided to employ somebody to do these tasks; in others the expertise is provided on a consultancy basis.
65. Meanwhile, there has been a welcome focusing in many areas on the areas of mission and evangelism, and the conscious decision by districts to embark on a great variety of initiatives using dedicated paid people (whether through the District Advance Fund, increased circuit assessments, approaches to grant-making bodies, appeals for direct donations or use of permissible trust funds).
66. Mention was also made above of the recognised need in some districts to support the District Chair's core role by 'buying' time from a particular circuit for a presbyter to be able to act for part of his or her time as a deputy or assistant Chair.
67. To add into the equation, there is the activity – current and planned – which is in effect delivered by staff based in a region or district and resourced financially from the Methodist Church Fund. At present this constitutes in England, a half-time District Development Enabler in each district and two full-time Training Officers in each Methodist Training Region (in some regions these have been augmented with extra staff funded by the districts). In Scotland and Wales a hybrid model of regional staff who share these roles has developed. The effect of *The Fruitful Field* resolutions is to create a body of dispersed connexional staff in the Network regions, the cost of which will, as to a substantial proportion, be borne by circuit assessments for the Methodist Church Fund. Whilst this does not directly impact upon the question of whether districts as such are sustainable, it needs to be seen that this is also 'larger than circuit' work which is largely funded ultimately through the assessment.

68. We are therefore paying directly or indirectly for much more activity to be done on a 'larger than circuit' basis than a generation ago, and this trend is likely to increase. Not all of it is new, and some represents a move from staff being based centrally (which may itself raise the question whether there comes a point when a move back in the other direction might be the most efficient way of handling certain matters). But the main point is that the ultimate effect upon a local church or circuit's finances needs to be acknowledged. (It is a separate question, not for this report, whether there are in fact ample capital resources held by local churches and circuits to fund all that we would aspire to do, and more!)
69. But to return to the question of district sustainability: it is also – indeed perhaps primarily - about the sorts of work that district life entails and which would traditionally have always had a willing volunteer who would feel called, even privileged, to do eg representing the district on a connexional body, being treasurer of a fund, organising the tea at Synod... If there are in many parts of the connexion difficulties in filling what many would see as essential roles in local church and circuit life, it is hardly surprising that there are problems in doing so in district appointments. That is not, of course, to say that 'districts are not sustainable' as such. But it does still mean that the questions of what work can and should be sustained, and what is the best pattern or patterns for doing so, are ones which are rightly asked now.

SECTION 4 'LARGER THAN CIRCUIT': WHY ANYTHING?

70. In setting up the working party, the Methodist Council saw the task as linking the process of the *Regrouping for Mission* initiative into 'larger than circuit' entities. The phrase 'larger than circuit' has therefore been used throughout this report: it is a useful reminder that the working party is not working to any pre-conceived model for the future (for instance, 'larger than circuit' does not necessarily mean 'larger than [current] district'). The phrase is simply referring to those 'in between' aspects of the church's life, currently focused in entities and activities which have a broader than circuit, but not connexion-wide, basis.
71. The first question is then: does the church now need any such 'in between' layer? Would it not be simpler – and cheaper – to work on the basis of a direct relationship of the circuits with the connexional governance bodies and Connexional Team?
72. This is a question which was considered at some length by the North West Districts and Isle of Man in their extensive review, and the working party has found their analysis very helpful, emerging as it did from a process involving a number of districts working from different experiences. The review offered some initial reflections and suggested that account needed to be taken of the following:
- circuits vary enormously in size, access to resources, staffing and ways of working;
 - this would make greater demands on circuit leadership and the Connexional Team;
 - the relationship with each other as churches and circuits in connexion is a valuable part of our ecclesiology;
 - the work currently undertaken by District Policy Committees or their equivalents enables us to 'bear one another's burdens' and 'watch over one another in love';
 - the district is connexionally enabling in matters such as candidating and probation;
 - circuits alone could too easily revert to hierarchical models of leadership, especially in the exercise of the Superintendent's role, and would have no easy external mechanism for resolving conflicts of interest or competition for resources;
 - districts offer effective resource sharing on a human scale built on relationships and dialogue;
 - the office of District Chair offers support, challenge and encouragement to Superintendents, ensuring they do not stand alone;

- the Chairs' stationing role (with lay stationing representatives) on behalf of the Conference offers proper oversight and connexional deployment of the important resource of the ordained amongst us.
73. It was concluded that "some elements of 'beyond circuit' could be delivered on an appropriate regional basis covering a large area. This would offer functional, task orientated aspects of our work. It would be appropriate for those tasks alone but not for the relationship-based togetherness we call connexion."
 74. This approach was considered in detail by the working group that has been exploring the closer working together of the four Yorkshire districts. They produced a helpful table that identified the tasks of a district and considered where, in their experience, they would be best undertaken. The current working party is grateful to have been able to draw upon this table as an example of how these questions can be addressed, and a version of it appears in Figure 1 in Appendix 4 below. In undertaking this piece of work, the question of what should happen 'beyond circuit' was asked by the Yorkshire group and the report concludes, "there is no one size at which everything 'between' circuits and connexion functions optimally ... some activities would be better co-ordinated over the wider area of a mega-region ... [others] might be better undertaken at a sub-regional level. A flexible approach to 'between' will allow us to tailor the provision to the local needs and to adopt an appropriate response which can vary from activity to activity."
 75. These two pieces of work, alongside conversations with other groups and individuals, led the working party to the following conclusion: that there remains a need for at least some functions to be undertaken in a broader context than the circuit but not on a connexion-wide basis, but that the question that should be asked at this point is 'how and where is each function which needs to be carried out best undertaken, and what organisational frameworks and patterns of leadership best enable this to happen?'

SECTION 5 SOME COMMON THEMES

76. The subject of this report is one where very different views are strongly held and expressed. We have explored above the arguments about whether such a review is necessary at all, or is long overdue, and those about whether any 'larger than circuit' entity is completely unnecessary, or an essential part of our connexional life.
77. There is one theme, however, which people whom the working party has consulted have advocated very consistently: "one size does not fit all". Whilst that phrase may not do justice to the complexity of this task, there is undoubtedly felt to be a great need to be aware of the particular context in which 'larger than circuit' activity happens in different parts of the connexion. This manifests itself in various ways.
78. For instance, there are significant differences in the numerical size of districts and in their nature, for instance the 'regional' London District, the 'national' entities in Wales and Scotland, the island districts, the inclusion of Gibraltar and Malta within the South East District. In addition some of these districts also relate to different legal and political systems.
79. Geography also plays a very significant role in two ways. If some 'larger than circuit' activity is proposed to take place on a wider basis than at present, the constraints of distance and travel networks need to be recognised, and set in the context of the issues raised by *Hope in God's Future*. Secondly, to say that we are not constitutionally organised on a territorial, boundary-based model is not to diminish the very significant value of 'place' in the life of the Methodist Church.

80. Then there are districts which increasingly – and perhaps to an even greater extent in the future, with the development of Covenanted Partnerships in Extended Areas - see their more natural linkages as being with ecumenical partners and say that any ‘boundaries’ should reflect that; other districts, whilst still being fully involved in ecumenical activity, have no prospect of aligning the work in this way.
81. There is the need to be aware of the thinking and developments which have already taken place in some areas. These include the following:
- the Scotland and Shetland Districts currently share a learning and development team;
 - the seven districts involved in the North West Districts Review process have signed a covenant, both as District Chairs and as Synods, for closer working together and are now beginning to explore their next steps in doing this;
 - the four districts in Yorkshire have been exploring how to work together more closely;
 - the Darlington and Newcastle upon Tyne Districts, who have a history of sharing a Training & Development Officer (TDO) and more recently a Training Officer (TO), have now made a temporary joint appointment of a ‘Regional Change Management Enabler’ to replace the DDEs who have recently moved on;
 - the Lincoln & Grimsby and Nottingham & Derby Districts have a history of sharing a TDO and, more recently, a TO and DDE;
 - the Birmingham and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Districts have previously shared a TDO and have also had conversations about a possible merger;
 - the Wales Synod has been created out of the former North Wales and South Wales Districts;
 - Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod currently share a learning and development team;
 - the Bedfordshire, Essex & Hertfordshire and East Anglia Districts currently share TOs;
 - the patterns of how the Chairs’ responsibilities in the London District (itself created in 2006) have been reviewed.
82. Another common theme is that there needs to be a recognition that there are distinct conversations to be had about a) any ongoing ‘larger than circuit’ entity or entities which might or might not reflect existing district functions and responsibilities and b) the role and responsibilities of the District Chair as they are currently exercised and might evolve. Obviously there are close links between the two, as our ecclesiology, constitutional arrangements and experience teach us. But the working party was very much made aware that, whatever may develop in other respects, there will continue to be the need for a sufficient number of leaders with the gifts, experience and time available to exercise this significant ministry of pastoral oversight and leadership.
83. Beyond these common themes, there was much underlying agreement about the principles and criteria upon which any larger than circuit entities and activity should be assessed. These appear in Paragraph 105 below.
84. Finally, however, where there is definitely *no* common theme is as to the question of process: views expressed to the working party differed strongly about how, if any change was to be recommended, this should be brought about. There are those who advocate a completely evolutionary approach: some changes are already happening, and any process should simply take ‘as long as it takes’. Others believe that the current system is under considerable pressure and a more directive approach implemented over a relatively short period is preferable. Reflections on the *Regrouping for Mission* process suggest that a lack of an agreed timescale and outcomes has been helpful for some but a difficulty for others. The working party believes that there is a need for an approach which, whilst flexible, is based upon a connexional sense of direction.

SECTION 6 THE PROPOSAL

85. The working party's proposal, endorsed by the Methodist Council, is as follows:

(a) The Conference should this year direct that a process be initiated whereby further explorations of the role and responsibilities both of the district and its Synod and of the District Chair are undertaken, and proposals developed for the patterns and structures which will within each particular context most effectively express the 'larger than circuit' aspects of connexional life.

(b) The process should be initially a two year process, with a report as to the various proposals being brought to the Conference of 2015.

(c) These explorations should initially each take place within and between the districts which have been identified as constituting a region for the purposes of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network.

86. Various details are dealt with below, but first, what is the thinking behind this basic approach?

87. First and foremost, the working party recognises that the impetus for this task is 'regrouping for mission' and would wish to underline this as the context in which any work goes forward.

88. The wide variety of views about what approach to take to any possible change was mentioned above. In this proposal, the working party has sought to offer a way forward which takes account of these various concerns. It is essentially about starting, or encouraging existing, conversations and offering some impetus and sense of direction. (Of course, if there are developments which are planned to move forward more quickly than the envisaged timetable, that is all to the good.) If this process is adopted, the working party believes that there needs to be a time-scale within which the districts should be asked to work in developing their proposals and reporting back to the Conference, which would then assess progress and set in place whatever further work might be required. Requiring those reports to be made in 2015 would balance the need for proper consultation within and between districts with the need to encourage the momentum which is beginning to build in some parts of the connexion. As is explained below, 2015 would in many respects only be the start of a process, out of which further consultations would be necessary (for instance if certain constitutional changes were to be made).

89. The initial grouping of districts for the purposes of this process arises out of the Conference's resolutions of 2012 upon *The Fruitful Field*, which required the working party to work closely with the Ministries Committee as it sought to establish the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network Regions, in which the teams of regional staff would operate. This joint piece of work has been undertaken in helpful consultation with the District Chairs' Meeting, where it became clear that the development of Network Regions needed to start by focusing, where possible, on groupings of districts that already had a history of working together, building on existing links and good practice, and avoiding the splitting of individual districts. The outcome of those discussions was the agreement at the Methodist Council in January 2013 to the configuration of regions based upon the maps presented at that meeting.

90. This has encouraged the working party to explore a way forward that builds on these developments. The existing challenge of having different sets of regional groupings for different purposes was highlighted by a number of people. It is clear that it would not be helpful to offer a process which involved yet another configuration. The working party is persuaded of the value of working with the groupings that have emerged from the *Fruitful Field* process, in taking forward these 'larger than circuit' conversations. (Having said that, it

would point out that there is something in the 'mutual accountability' offered by the current stationing regions which it is important not to lose in the Learning Network configuration which allows for some single-district regions.)

91. There are two points which cannot be stressed too strongly. First, as to the various functions of districts: this is not simply an exercise in seeking to solve any problems of sustainability by continuing to do all that we do at present but moving it to another 'level'. Serious questions need to be asked about what are the priorities for the work currently undertaken in districts, about where each such piece of work is best done, and what we decide – albeit with great regret – is not to be done at all.
92. Secondly, this is not (contrary to what some have expected the report to contain) a simple proposal immediately to create a set of 'Regional Districts'. A whole range of outcomes could emerge in 2015. The important thing is that the sharp questions are asked and worked through. What follows is not an exhaustive list, but simply an attempt to suggest a few possible outcomes.
 - Districts might enter into something like an informal 'federal' structure, perhaps based on an agreement (like the ecumenical 'Lund principle') only to act as separate entities in matters where there are compelling reasons to do so and otherwise generally to act together, delegating authority to do so to whatever joint bodies are thought appropriate.
 - It may be that in some instances, the districts might take as a first step what the districts in the North West and the Isle of Man have already done in seeing a covenant (entered into both by the Synods and the Chairs) to work together more closely as the way to begin to move forward in mission. The working party has encountered differing views about the use of 'covenant' language in this context, but sees the value of a formal agreement in affirming the commitment to work together more closely.
 - In some places, it may indeed be that a single larger 'regional' district is the right way forward, or at least the merging of some districts within that region.
 - It may be possible that in some situations, the conclusion might be that (whilst there could be some aspects where districts could further usefully share with each other, or conversely delegate some tasks to larger circuits or groups of circuits) generally the current arrangement of districts 'works'. Such a conclusion would need to be based upon a careful exploration of the situation and a clear-sighted view about how much activity is actually sustainable by each district and what level of connexional support this requires.
93. It is obvious that the composition of the various regions (ranging from the London District through to the North West where there are seven districts already in a covenanted relationship) means that the process would start at different points and be undertaken very differently in different contexts, but it is the working party's view that the challenge to explore – and keep exploring – these issues is a **connexion-wide task for all districts**, in enabling us more clearly to discern and respond to God's call to discipleship and mission.
94. Finally, although the recommendation is that the conversations start from the groupings created for the Learning Network, it may well be – as has happened when circuits began to be involved with *Regrouping for Mission* – that there are occasions where it is found to be helpful then to initiate conversations with others outside those initially grouped together to achieve a more effective solution, with some movement into or out of that group.

PART B WHAT FLOWS FROM THE PROPOSAL?

95. Accompanying the basic proposal, the working party has various recommendations to make about how the process would be taken forward, and about possible parallel work to be done.

a) Connexional facilitation, through support, oversight and coordination:

96. In *Regrouping for Mission* in relation to circuits, having a focused and funded role to support and encourage the process of change (ie through District Development Enablers) has been valued by many people. It is the working party's view that some level of support of this kind, on a connexional basis, would be equally, if not more, valuable in the proposed process, not least in sharing information and encouraging reflection on the different ways of working being explored elsewhere in the connexion. **It is recommended** that this could be encompassed within the initial tasks of the regional Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network staff with relevant church and community development responsibilities.
97. Alongside that support, it is envisaged that the Conference would need to appoint a 'larger than circuit' coordinating group to take forward the process and to bring regular reports to the Methodist Council which would have overall oversight of the process on behalf of the Conference. The working party **recommends** that such a group be appointed.
98. Beyond that, it is not suggested that the Conference would attempt to prescribe a detailed scheme for how the consultations between and within districts would take place. Clearly circuits, as well as district groups and officers, would expect to play a major part in this process, and conversations with ecumenical partners would be essential.
99. If a comprehensive and well thought through report upon the process is to be brought, either by the Methodist Council or by the coordinating group on its behalf, to the 2015 Conference (including appropriate consultation with, and seeking advice from, other connexional bodies as explained below), it would be reasonable to seek some indication of likely responses by, say, the end of January 2015. The working party **recommends** that that should be the response date.
100. One point which emerged from the working party's consultations was not directly upon the subject matter of this report, but related to it. It is important that a piece of work is done on gathering together the learning from the *Regrouping for Mission* process as it has related to the reconfiguration of circuits. What has 'worked' and what has not – and what are the criteria for assessing that? It is understood that arrangements are being put in place for this to be done, and it is important that its results are shared with the wider connexion to inform future developments.

b) **Parameters**

101. The working party sought the views of the Council as to whether, in such an open-ended process the Conference should be invited to set parameters as to possible responses? In other words should there be some clearly defined, quantitative, limits within which the districts would be asked to work, related to eg finance or resources of personnel? In the light of the discussion about 'sustainability' above, this would clearly be a complex exercise. In the event the Council declined to direct the working party to do further work on this for inclusion in this report.

c) **Criteria for assessing any proposals**

102. The working party has given some thought to how far the Conference would want to indicate in advance, if not the range of possibilities, at least what would be expected of any proposals and how they would be assessed in due course – what might loosely be called benchmarks.
103. Out of its many conversations the working party has distilled some criteria upon which it suggests that any review of 'larger than circuit' entities and activity might be based and upon which the outcomes might be assessed.
104. First, as was stressed above, the impetus for this task is 'regrouping for *mission*', and this is the context in which any review should take place and by which it should be judged.
105. Then the working party provisionally identified at a relatively early stage some criteria which it felt would assist it in its own thinking. These seem to be reflected in and confirmed by the views that others involved have expressed, suggesting that the priorities in any review would be to look for 'larger than circuit' approaches which would:
- maintain a clear focus on serving local churches and circuits in their mission;
 - provide a professional and coherent provision for local churches and circuits;
 - prioritise relationships, connections and networks, rather than boundaries;
 - enable the connexion to be inter-connected effectively through good communications and networks.
106. The working party also engaged in some more specific thinking, based upon the 'Healthy Circuit' model, about what such a model might look like in a 'larger than circuit' context. This was offered to various groups during the formation of this report and was found to be of some value. Building upon that material the working party has worked on a more detailed paper designed to offer guidance as to how the task of addressing the questions raised by this report could be approached. This can be found in Appendix 4 below. It will be seen that the questions focus upon the criteria of:
- being shaped for mission, and supporting mission and missional teams;
 - inspiring discipleship;
 - working in partnership.
107. The working party recognises that more work will need to be done on shaping this process of exploration if the basic proposal is accepted, but believes that it would be helpful for the Conference to consider and, if thought appropriate, give general approval to the criteria offered in this section.

d) **The role of District Chair**

108. Reference has been made at various points above to the changing, and demanding, role of the District Chair, and the proposed process will inevitably involve a further exploration of it in relation to *district*-based activity, not least the different patterns of personal and corporate leadership which have emerged in different contexts.
109. However, these increasingly varied patterns of leadership, and the demands of time and energy made upon the Chairs as connexional leaders, leads the working party to **recommend** a more focused piece of work be done in any case on these *connexional* aspects (which may involve revisiting or building upon *What is a District Chair?*). For instance, the working party would suggest that there is a need to review the balance of ordained and lay leadership in the Connexional Leaders' Forum. This could perhaps best be undertaken by a group which is separate from the coordinating group mentioned above but would need to have some common membership so as to keep in touch with emerging developments within the districts.

e) Connexionalism

110. Earlier in the report are to be found comments about how far attitudes to connexionalism have changed over the years, and even in the recent past. The very proper focus on the contextual nature of mission and ministry brings with it challenges – not least, the risk of personality-driven or exclusively local agendas – and there is a continuing need to hold that in tension with connexionalism. There is a difference between recognising and celebrating our diversity and fragmenting our Connexion.
111. It will be clear that there is the potential for a much greater fragmentation if the Conference in 2015 were to receive proposals for a multiplicity of different ‘larger than circuit’ patterns. To some extent the ‘accompanied’ nature of the process, through the resources of material and personnel provided, may mean that this does not present a significant challenge. But the working party would point out that there are two connexional bodies which would very much have this question on their agenda in any case: the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee.
112. Progress reports on the *Larger than Circuit* reports to the Council have been made to the Faith and Order Committee during the last year. For a number of reasons, the committee has already been doing some thinking about the nature of connexionalism in the twenty first century and sees a significant link with the working party’s work. The working party believes that this is an important piece of work which needs to be done in any case, and brings a resolution to that effect below. If the proposed process goes forward, it would be important to have a robust line of communication between those primarily charged under our constitution with reflecting theologically on these matters and those who are working on the development of any new patterns of ‘larger than circuit’ work, and this is reflected in the resolution.
113. An outline of the current constitutional provisions as to districts appears earlier in this report. It may be that the sort of responses which are received would necessitate changes. These might be ones which could be brought into effect quite easily, for instance by the Conference amending some Standing Orders to remove the mandatory nature of certain existing requirements. But there might be more major suggestions which would raise significant questions about the nature and functions of districts, Synods or District Chairs, and work would need to be done in conjunction with the Law and Polity Committee to arrive at a solution which is properly located within a connexional framework for our church. This might involve amending the Deed of Union. If so, then it would be helpful to be able to bring proposals for such amendments to the Conference in 2015 for provisional adoption, permitting them to go out for consultation, before confirmation or otherwise by the Conference of 2016.
114. For these reasons it seems appropriate to recommend (as suggested above) that at least general reports as to likely outcomes be made available to the Methodist Council and to these bodies by the end of January 2015.

f) Chairs’ appointments

115. Finally, the working party has given thought to an issue which has arisen at various points in its discussions. It is clear that, over the next few years, a significant number of District Chairs’ appointments may become vacant. If the nomination process is to be carried out carefully and in accordance with Standing Orders it begins very early, to allow a very long lead time before a new Chair takes up office (to enable the possibility of a full year of ‘shadowing’ the current office-holder). To what extent may districts feel constrained in their exploration of the possibilities for new ways of working by the fact that they have recently gone through, or

are in the midst of, a nomination process and have identified a person offering the gifts of leadership which they are seeking?

116. The working party offered some thoughts about three possible options that the Council might follow in this regard. These would in two instances have involved proposing to the Conference a suspension of relevant Standing Orders. The more 'extreme' was to propose that there should be a one year moratorium upon the process for making new appointments to chairs coming vacant in September 2015, with appropriate interim arrangements being made between the district(s) concerned and the Stationing Committee for the connexional year 2015-16. The other was to take account of the suggested 'Larger than Circuit' review process by proposing the suspension of Standing Orders relating to the length of a new appointment or as to the requirement that a nomination should be brought a year ahead.
117. In the event, the Council accepted neither of these, but favoured the third option. This was to ensure that the fact that the process was under way was made explicit in any district statement, with the willingness of the applicant to work with the process being part of the assessment criteria, then relying on the 'usual processes' – including the authority of the Conference to station all ministers annually - to deal with any situation as it arose. This is therefore contained in resolution 35/8 below.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

35/1. The Conference received the report.

35/2. The Conference adopted the proposal contained in sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph 85 of the report.

35/3. The Conference directed each Synod to participate in the process referred to in Resolution 35/2 above, conferring both with the circuits in the district and with any other relevant districts including primarily those with which it forms a region for the purposes of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network. The Conference further directs each Synod to ensure that there is adequate opportunity for the participation in this process of children and young people in the District including by finding appropriate ways to consult with children and young people.

35/4. a) The Conference resolved to appoint a coordinating group as recommended in paragraph 97, to be responsible for taking forward the process connexionally and for reporting regularly to the Methodist Council which shall have oversight of the work.

b) The members of the coordinating group shall be:

The Revd Loraine N Mellor (Convenor)

Miss Kathleen Burrell

The Revd Rodney Hill

Mr Michael J Noble

The Revd Dr John K Nyota

The Revd Carla S Quenet (nee Hall)

Reasoned Statements

The Revd Loraine N Mellor (Convenor)

Loraine is a member of the Larger than Circuit working party and will therefore provide valuable continuity for the development of Larger than Circuit. Loraine is a District Chair and a member of the Methodist Council.

Miss Kathleen Burrell

Kathy was a member of the Co-ordinating Group for the regional review of the four London Districts. Kathy is about to retire as Synod Secretary of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District and fulfils various roles within her Circuit. Kathy was a senior civil servant with HMRC and has experience in organisational, strategic and project management.

The Revd Rodney Hill

Rod is a member of the Larger than Circuit working party and was a member of earlier groups which considered similar issues. Rod can therefore provide a considerable recollection as to the evolution of the issues around Larger than Circuit over the years. Rod is currently District Development Enabler in the Liverpool District.

Mr Michael J Noble

Michael is District Development Enable in the Leeds and West Yorkshire Districts. He has been appointed as from 1 September 2013 to the role of Regional Co-ordinator of the Yorkshire Region of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network. Michael also brings his experience from University management and administration.

The Revd John K Nyota

John is the Managing Director of 'The Wesley', Methodist International Centre in London. John has served as a chaplain and circuit minister and will bring with him a wide range of skills developed from his experience of circuit ministry and developing 'The Wesley' as an ethical brand.

The Revd Carla S Quenet (nee Hall)

Carla is a member of the Larger than Circuit working party and will therefore provide continuity for the development of Larger than Circuit. Carla is a circuit minister and Presbyterian Synod Secretary.

c) The Conference directed the Methodist Council to ensure that the relevant members of the Connexional Team referred to in paragraph 96 work in conjunction with the coordinating group in carrying out this aspect of their work.

d) The Conference directs the co-ordinating group to work with those planning for 3Generate 2013 with the aim of enabling consultations to start at the event about the issues being explored.

35/5. The Conference gave general approval to the criteria outlined in paragraphs 104-106, as the basis upon which the explorations should proceed and against which proposals emerging from them might be considered by the Conference. It directed the coordinating group to begin its work by producing more detailed guidance as to specific issues to be addressed, for use by those involved in the process, along the lines of the material offered in Appendix 4.

35/6. The Conference directed the District Chairs to report to the Secretary of the Conference by the end of January 2015 upon what reports and proposals are being formulated in their Districts in response to the explorations.

35/7. The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee to work with the coordinating group upon any proposals emerging from the process which would require an amendment to the Deed of Union, Model Trusts or Standing Orders and if necessary to bring such amendments to the Conference of 2015 for consideration.

35/8. The Conference directed that, with immediate effect, those responsible for processes leading to nominations for any new appointments as District Chair shall ensure that the existence of this 'Larger than Circuit' connexional process is made explicit in the

documentation prepared for the nomination process, and that evidence of willingness to work with the connexional process is included in the criteria for assessment of candidates.

35/9. a) The Conference adopted the recommendation in paragraph 109 that a group be appointed to review recent developments in the role of District Chair, particularly in relation to the exercise of personal and collegiate leadership connexionally, with a view to reporting to the Conference of 2015.

b) The Conference authorised the Methodist Council to approve more detailed terms of reference for the group's work.

c) The members of this group shall be:

The Revd D Paul Wood (Convenor)

The Revd Olufemi R W Cole-Njie

The Revd David Hinchliffe

Mrs Charlotte Osborn

Mr David Ridley

Reasoned Statements

The Revd D Paul Wood (Convenor)

Paul is Superintendent minister in the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit and has led the process for circuit reorganisation in light of the 'Regrouping for Mission'. In his former role as a Synod Secretary Paul coordinated a District Chair's nomination committee and has led ordinands retreats.

The Revd Olufemi R W Cole-Njie

Mrs Cole-Njie is Superintendent minister of the Forest Circuit. She has close connections with the Methodist Women in Britain and the Women's Work in The Gambia. She has served as chair of the Race Stakeholder Forum and is a member of the Methodist Council.

The Revd David Hinchliffe

David is a member of the Larger than Circuit working party and therefore provides valuable continuity for this evolving work through the small group. David is District Chair and leads the induction processes for nominated and designated District Chairs.

Mrs Charlotte Osborn

Charlotte is Chaplain at Newcastle International Airport. Charlotte has trained as a worship leader and serves as a chair on the Connexional Selection Panel. Charlotte brings the valuable experience of being the wife of a District Chair and is therefore aware of the developments in the role of a District Chair.

Mr David Ridley

David is Synod Secretary for the South East District and member of the District Policy Committee. He attends St Mark's Crescent Methodist Church in the Thames Valley Circuit and is a Methodist local preacher. David has served on the 'Review of Conference Membership' group and is vastly experienced in marketing and business development and brings all these skills and roles to the life of the group.

d) The Conference directed the group to work in consultation with the coordinating group appointed under resolution 35/4.

35/10. The Conference welcomed the consideration already being given by the Faith and Order Committee to issues of connexionalism as identified in paragraph 112 and directed that further work be done on this with a view to a report being brought to the Conference of 2015.

This work shall be carried out in consultation with the coordinating group appointed under resolution 35/4.

Appendix 1 Reports, notes and papers reviewed by the working party

Methodist Conference and Council reports

Called to Love and Praise - Conference Statement 1999

General Secretary's Report to Methodist Conference 2011

Fruitful Field Report to Methodist Conference 2011

Report of the North West Districts Review Group Report to Methodist Conference 2011

General Secretary's Report to Methodist Conference 2007 Appendix B

Talking of God, Acting for God Report of the Training Institutions Review Group to Methodist Conference 2007

Mapping a Way Forward; Regrouping for Mission Methodist Council, October 2006

What is a District Chair? Report to Methodist Conference 2006

Notes from circuit Circuit and district *Regrouping for Mission* conversations

Report to 4 Yorkshire Districts Meeting September 2011

Development of Methodism in Scotland Report from the Scotland District Development Team 2011

Regrouping for Mission: Districts, Chairs & Regions notes from CLF 2010

Review of the Yorkshire Dioceses the Dioceses Commission 2010

Reflections on the PCT in Cumbria prepared as part of *Regrouping for Mission* process in the Cumbria district, 2009

Other papers

A Hub for Rural Mission a paper by Rod Hill (DDE in Liverpool district)

Circuits Working in Federation a paper by Matthew Reed (DDE in Southampton District), 2009

UK Church attendance and experience segregation Tear Fund, 2006

Maps

A series of maps that compared Methodist district boundaries with ...

Methodist training regions, Methodist stationing regions. Church of England Dioceses, Baptist Union Associations, United Reformed Church Synods, Catholic Dioceses in England and Wales

Appendix 2 Consultations undertaken by the working party

District Chairs' Meeting, and informal conversations between individual Chairs and the working party chair

Connexional Leaders' Forum

Connexional meeting of DDEs

NW Regional Training Forum – meeting of District Chairs and DDEs

NE Regional Training Forum – meeting with District Chairs

Cornwall District – meeting of Superintendents and DPC

The Revd John Hellyer (Chair of SE District)

Group that worked on possible merger of Birmingham and Wolverhampton + Shrewsbury Districts

The Revds Jenny Impey and Stuart Jordan (Chairs of the London District) -

Reconfigured Circuits group

Appendix 3 District numbers

		2011/12			
Districts		Membership	Circuits	Churches	Ministers ¹
1	Synod Cymru	1586	1	88	6
2	Wales Synod	8143	16	210	67
5	Birmingham	9555	12	163	58
6	Bolton + Rochdale	5836	8	97	35
7	Bristol	8335	10	212	71
9	Cumbria	3780	15	119	27
10	Channel Islands	1358	2	27	12
11	Chester + Stoke	8574	13	187	53
12	Cornwall	6405	16	213	46
13	Darlington	5755	12	146	48
14	East Anglia	7460	15	258	70
15	Isle of Man	1065	1	34	8
16	Leeds	6681	11	113	56
17	Lincoln + Grimsby	5381	14	169	43
18	Liverpool	7000	10	109	45
19	Manchester + Stockport	8648	20	147	58
20	Newcastle	8706	12	175	65
21	Lancashire	7979	12	117	54
22	Nottingham + Derby	9320	20	234	69
23	Northampton	11026	23	260	84
24	Plymouth + Exeter	8746	17	222	66
25	Sheffield	7404	15	189	59
26	Southampton	10239	23	195	69
27	West Yorkshire	7702	10	164	58
28	Wolverhampton + Shrewsbury	7681	13	230	64
29	York + Hull	9240	23	237	67
31	Scotland	2405	8	43	22
32	Shetland	205	1	18	3
34	Beds, Essex + Hertfordshire	9101	14	196	65
35	London	19175	40	241	138
36	South East	12450	24	208	85
Total		226941	419	4892	1671

¹ based on district deployment figures

By way of comparison the *Minutes of Conference* for 1957 reports the following statistics: Total membership recorded in the circuits in Great Britain (which would include at that time the members of the Wesley Deaconess Order, of whom nearly 250 were in the active work): 742,444; Probationers and ministers in the active work: 3,454.

Appendix 4 Guidance Material – Regrouping for Mission / Larger than Circuit

Introduction

Standing Order 400A(1) begins: 'The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns.'

Is it now time to re-imagine the role of the District in 'advancing the mission of the Church in a region' and to ask what a 'larger than circuit' entity might look like and what its responsibilities would be?

Each District is encouraged to explore this question in some detail through a number of exercises and further questions, outlined below. These reflections should focus on the context of a particular District and its relationships with its Circuits, with other Districts (particularly those in the same Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network region) and with ecumenical partners. It is envisaged that these reflections will be completed by the end of January 2015, following a period of appropriate consultation, and will then form the basis of reports to Methodist Council in the spring of 2015 and the 2015 Methodist Conference.

Reflection

Any 'larger than circuit' entity should have 'advancing the mission of the Church' at its heart and to aid this reflection five focus areas have been identified. In each case Districts are invited to undertake, in consultation, an exercise in which they imagine what the Methodist Church might look like, in their particular context, if this particular area was its focus ... there are many ways in which this could be undertaken and districts are encouraged to be as creative as possible.

1. Shaped for Mission

Imagine a Methodist Church with its focus on being *shaped for mission*: What does it look like? What model of 'larger than circuit' would best encourage and enable this?

This imagining could include ...

- encouraging church leaders, officers and staff working across the region to use their gifts and skills where they are most needed to be missionally effective
- undertaking strategic planning that is forward looking and visionary
- modelling structures and ways of working that are participative and accessible to all.

2. Inspiring discipleship

Imagine a Methodist Church with its focus on *inspiring discipleship*: What does it look like? What model of 'larger than circuit' would best encourage and enable this?

This imagining could include ...

- providing opportunities for gathering together to offer inspiration, mutual support, challenge and 'watching over one another in love'
- providing and supporting effective learning and development opportunities in response to the requirements and expectations of local churches, Circuits and the Conference
- drawing effectively on learning and development offered by other agencies
- encouraging and supporting life-long discipleship and vocational discernment.

3. Supporting local mission

Imagine a Methodist Church with its focus on *supporting local mission*: What does it look like? What model of 'larger than circuit' would best encourage and enable this?

This imagining could include ...

- taking a strategic approach to encouraging pioneering mission and developing fresh expressions of church
- providing effective resources (ie finance, people and property) for local mission and evangelistic activity
- effectively evaluating the missional nature of applications for grants and consent for property projects
- targeting grant making to areas where it will be most effective and make a real difference locally.

4. Supporting missional teams

Imagine a Methodist Church with its focus on being *supporting missional teams*: What does it look like? What model of 'larger than circuit' would best encourage and enable this?

This imagining could include ...

- developing effective relationships with the staff of the Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network
- providing effective personnel and expertise, that is not available locally, through officers and staff or by providing access to appropriate professional services
- supporting work with leaders of faith groups, third sector and other groupings working for the good of the region
- supporting deployment and oversight of ministry through the support of paid and voluntary lay work and the stationing of presbyters and deacons.

5. Working in partnership

Imagine a Methodist Church with its focus on *working in partnership*: What does it look like? What model of 'larger than circuit' would best encourage and enable this?

This imagining could include ...

- identifying and engaging with the networks and partnerships that are most valuable
- exploring how Circuits and, at present, Districts best work together, with ecumenical and other partners
- recognising the value of church leaders, officers and staff working effectively with ecumenical and other partners
- exploring ways of working outside the models of inherited Church
- providing an effective link between the Circuits, the Conference and the Connexional Team.

Questions

Using the five pictures created, and within the context of the District and the network region, consider the following questions:

- a) Compare these reflections with the various functions currently carried out by Districts. Which of them need to continue? Where are they uniquely or best done? (Figure 1 is offered as a template for this.)
- b) How do the current district structures enable or hinder the task of advancing the mission of the Church?
- c) What would a 'larger than circuit' entity that best incorporates the results of your reflections look like?
- d) What, in any structures that are developed, would ensure
 - accountability
 - simplicity
 - sustainability?
- e) What are the people roles that are required? Which are no longer essential or desirable?
- f) How are these roles best undertaken by the district chair, other officers and staff or other agencies?

Action

In the light of your responses to these questions please identify the action you intend to undertake in the next year ...

... as a district

... as a network region

Regrouping for Mission - Larger than Circuit Fig 1 Current district functions <i>identify which functions are uniquely or best done by whom</i> <i>– if at all</i>	Do we still need to do this?	... if so, who does this uniquely or best?		
		Circuit	Larger than circuit	Connexion
Functions				
Archives	Yes / No			
Awareness raising of Methodist charities	Yes / No			
Candidates for ministry	Yes / No			
Chaplaincy overview	Yes / No			
Children and youth networks and events	Yes / No			
City Centre missions	Yes / No			
Complaints and discipline	Yes / No			
Creating opportunity for circuits to work together	Yes / No			
Diaconal networks	Yes / No			
Discipleship training	Yes / No			
District Advance Fund	Yes / No			
Ecumenical relationships	Yes / No			
Engagement with wider society	Yes / No			
Elections and appointments	Yes / No			
Interfaith relationships	Yes / No			
International houses	Yes / No			
Lay employment oversight	Yes / No			
Lay ministries: networking and continuing development	Yes / No			
LEP designations and constitutional approval	Yes / No			
Local Preachers: support and continuing development	Yes / No			
Memorials and resolutions to Conference	Yes / No			
Methodist schools, FE and HE establishments	Yes / No			
Mission policy and strategy making	Yes / No			
Pastoral care of Supernumeraries	Yes / No			
Probationers: support and oversight	Yes / No			
Property consent	Yes / No			
Sabbaticals	Yes / No			
Stationing	Yes / No			
Superintendents meeting	Yes / No			
Support, deployment and oversight of ministries	Yes / No			
Synod: ministerial and representative	Yes / No			
Vocational discernment	Yes / No			
World Church networking and awareness raising	Yes / No			
Please add below any functions you feel are missing				
	Yes / No			
	Yes / No			
	Yes / No			

