

DVD Social Responsibility

Task

To create a DVD for the London District to use in developing awareness of the centrality of social responsibility to the Christian faith

Objectives

- To enlist the assistance of Methodists involved in public life in an education programme on the relevance of social and civic engagement
- To offer a resource to worship leaders, Sunday School teachers and house group leaders to develop teaching and discussion on vocation and volunteering as part of Christian vocation
- To ensure that social responsibility is incorporated in the formation of new Methodist members through confirmation preparation classes.

Production

The Social Responsibility Commission (SRC) with help from other leaders in the District will invite 10 people engaged in public life

- To be interviewed on film to say why they got involved and what they are most proud of
- To be available as resource people to the Circuits to promote the DVD as an educational tool

The SRC will ensure that the diversity of the District and the potential for engagement is adequately represented:

- In ethnicity (e.g. White, Chinese, African, and Caribbean)
- Including men and women and different age groups
- A mix of those with professional engagement and those who volunteer their engagement
- Different types of social and civic engagement such as Nursing, Social Work, Teaching, Politics, Medicine, Community Organising, Debt counselling, work with Parents, Prisoners, Addicts, Homeless and Refugees

The SRC will devise a theological narrative to underpin the interviews based on a parable or biblical text. It will also include historical references to John Wesley's ministry by incorporating examples from the heritage museum at Wesley's Chapel.

Production will need to be to a professional standard and the SRC will commission this in the autumn of 2012 either from Applectart or from an animation studio.

The finished DVD which it is envisaged will not exceed 5 minutes in duration is to be ready for Synod Spring 2013.

Theological Roots

Caring for your neighbour, protecting the widow and the orphan and God's concern for justice for the poor are major themes in the Bible. The jubilee teaching of the Old Testament was concerned with taking debt seriously and ensuring that economic redemption was integral to the way society operates. The prophets were consistently critical of all forms of exploitation, and usury was forbidden.

Health and wholeness, physical and spiritual, are major themes in the New Testament. Most of Jesus' ministry involves the bestowing or restoration of health: to the blind and physically disabled, the chronically infirm, lepers, and the possessed. The poor and the outcast receive special attention, building upon the Hebrew emphasis on God's special concern for the poor:

When you harvest your fields, do not cut the corn at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the ears of corn that were left; leave them for poor people and foreigners. The Lord is your God. (Leviticus 23:22)

Jesus saw his ministry as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. (Luke 4: 18-19)

The parables of the Good Samaritan and of Dives and Lazarus show how Jesus approached issues of social responsibility. The New Testament strongly associates our love of God with love of neighbour:

"If someone says he loves God but hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother whom he has seen." (1 John 4:20)

Jesus was a restorer of health, and he expected his disciples to continue and expand holistic health ministries. In the Gospel of Luke, he sends out 70 followers, telling them: *"Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"* (Luke 10:8-9)

St. Paul (in I Corinthians 12:27-31) points to "gifts of healing" as a reality within the church as the body of Christ in the world. The Letter of James points to the healing properties of the prayers and anointing of church elders within the community. (James 5:13-14) By its nature as the body of Christ, the church is at once a therapeutic community for disciples and a source of healing for the wounded in the world and the world itself.

John Wesley and Methodist Heritage

John Wesley was a strong advocate for health. His emphasis on spiritual and social *holiness* included spiritual, social, and physical *wholeness*. Wesley was extremely practical in his concerns for healthy families and physical bodies. His apothecary in

the museum at Wesley Chapel is evidence of his interest as are several other artefacts housed there.

Wesley opposed unhealthy industrial working conditions and helped men and women reach for economic stability. He even edited a manual on home remedies because he knew that the poor of his day had no access to the emerging sciences of healing. Methodist circuit riders were expected to carry Wesley's book of cures in their saddlebags along with their Bibles. Wesley wanted preachers prepared to recommend healing potions as well as to expound Scripture. He also believed that the use of the physician's craft should be combined with prayer--"the medicine of medicines." (Wesley's Works, vol. xiv, p. 258)

Wesley was an active campaigner for prison reform and the abolition of slavery. He established schools and wrote books to be sold cheaply so that ordinary people would be able to afford them. He set up a revolving loan fund which he promoted into his old age as a means to support start up businesses.

The centuries between New Testament times and Wesley's ministry were not devoid of Christian commitment to physical health and response to the needs of the poor. Indeed, response to physical needs is a central and profound component of Christian theology. Much of what Christians and the institutional church have done in ministry across the ages reflects humanitarian motivations. Responding to the need God sets before us entails prayer for the needy and ourselves and a sense of the saving power of the kingdom that comes near in healing and proclamation.

Mercy and Justice

Mercy is a major component in Christian outreach, and the historical record is impressive. Our predecessors built significant health-related institutions: hospitals, clinics, homes for children and the elderly. Many of those facilities still exist, although many depend more heavily today on government funding. The Jubilee 2000 campaign which tackled the indebtedness of poor nations is a good modern example of how the Church was able to mobilise its members and others in the community to take on the cause of the poor and create political momentum for change.

Rationale

The Methodist Church has long associations with political life. Many of the early trade unionists, including the Tolpuddle Martyrs, were members of the Methodist Church. Still today a group of MPs meet as the Methodist Parliamentary Fellowship and holds an annual Parliamentary Methodist Covenant service in the chapel at the palace of Westminster.

The Methodist Church has stated that 'the commitment of individual Christians to work for social and political change should be recognised as a fully legitimate form of Christian discipleship'. In a society where self interest, acquisitiveness and individual happiness are often seen as the over-riding interests, the Church, and Christians within it, are called to witness meanings, values and purposes beyond ourselves, whilst recognising our own self-interest and hypocrisy.

People sometimes argue that involvement in political life involves getting our hands dirty, so is something Christians should avoid. But we believe in a God who is present in everything, even political institutions; a God who is heard throughout the Bible calling for justice for the widows, orphans and aliens who were oppressed by the powers of the day; and a God who seeks to transform relationship with and between people. If politics is about how we choose to live together and to treat one another, there is surely a place for discerning the activity of God in politics.

When the Methodist Church as a body engages with political issues, it tries to follow certain principles:

- the Church must be self-critical before it presumes to be critical of others
- Church statements must demonstrate a competence which will be taken seriously
- when seeking to address a context in which people are victimised and marginalized, the Church must engage with them and give serious attention to their views
- consideration should be given to the diversity of insight in the Church, and open debate made possible within the Church

There are any number of resources to help you get involved in issues that you care about.

- join the campaign network of one of a number of organisations – eg Christian Aid (www.christian-aid.org.uk), the Trade Justice Movement (www.tjm.org.uk), Housing Justice (www.justhousing.org.uk), Church Action on Poverty (www.church-poverty.org.uk). These will provide you with material to write to your MP, organise local campaigns or arrange lobbies.
- find out what the Methodist Church is working on at the moment and is saying in your name. See [Campaigns](#)
- if you have expertise on a particular issue – eg addictions, genetics, employment, asylum – please send your details to the Secretary for Parliamentary and Political Affairs. The Methodist Church often needs to call on people with particular expertise when responding on a new policy issue.
- write to your MP. You can find out your MP's name through the constituency locata website www.locata.co.uk/commons. Then write to them at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA. Keep your letter fairly short, and ensure that the language is temperate and polite. Avoid writing in capitals, underlining or quoting from the Bible. Where possible draw on your personal experience and refer to how it relates to their constituency. Ask them to raise it with the appropriate Government minister and to reply to you. When they write back to you, feel free to continue the correspondence – turn it into a conversation!
- organise a hustings meeting for candidates for the next General Election through your local churches together group. More information can be found from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland website – www.churcheselection.org.uk

- Join a Christian grouping within one of the political parties. Christians in Politics is an initiative of the Christian Socialist Movement, the Conservative Christian Fellowship and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum.
www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk¹
- Propose that your church join London Citizens as one of 250 member institutions across London. This will give you the opportunity of working with Mosques, Synagogues, Schools, Trades Unions, Universities and other Voluntary Agencies for the common good. London Citizens offers training to member institutions, is non partisan and democratic in its governance. For more information go to www.londoncitizens.org.uk

The commitment to the Living Wage² is a good example of the Church working on issues of poverty. The Methodist Conference in 2010 decided that the Living Wage would be the minimum basis for the employment of all lay workers. In order to campaign for change in the market rates for low paid workers, it is important that the Church has first taken steps to put its own house in order.

16/9/11 PER

¹ See <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1546>

² See Living Wage Foundation <http://www.citizensuk.org/campaigns/living-wage-campaign/the-living-wage-foundation>