

Marks of a Healthy Circuit

a discussion starter for circuits in the London District

The Connexional initiative *Mapping a Way Forward: Re-Grouping for Mission* has challenged Methodists to think again about the distinctive nature of the Circuit within Methodism. It has encouraged a process of Circuit Reviews and possible mergers to help Circuits become more effective.

In recent years there have been various guidelines for healthy and effective churches: *Our Calling, The Priorities of the Methodist Church, Seven Marks of a Healthy Church, Five Marks of Mission, Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. In this leaflet the District is offering some suggestions for what might constitute a **healthy Circuit**. These '**Marks of a Healthy Circuit**' have been developed from careful reflection on church and Circuit reviews, Circuit mergers, and discussion with Superintendents and Circuit Stewards.

In London we know that our members' diversity of experience in different denominations and Connexions means that what a Circuit is and how it works is not always fully understood. Therefore the District Council encourages Circuits to use the Marks of a Healthy Circuit as a basis for thought and discussion and to help understanding as they face urgent questions about their future.

Seven Marks of a Healthy Circuit

1. An effective **Staff Team** of between **5 and 8 ministers or full-time staff members**. It is clear that one of the big gains in Circuit mergers has been the increased quality of staff fellowship, support and teamwork.
 - a. Fewer than 5 members and any individual relationship issues, health problems and sabbaticals can present major difficulties.
 - b. More than 8 members and the sense of team work, accountability and shared focus can be lost.
 - c. Training opportunities are more readily available to a larger group and a diversity of gifts and styles can be offered and nurtured.
2. **Regular meetings of a Circuit Leadership Team [CLT]** for prayer, support and business and to build relationships of mutual trust and accountability.
 - a. The CLT should meet **at least monthly** otherwise a sense of shared purpose is lost.
 - b. The pattern for lay leadership in the local and wider church can be nurtured as authority and responsibility are shared and individual leadership gifts developed.
 - c. It facilitates good communication and planning.
 - d. It is important to recognise the constraints on time for lay members and plan accordingly.
3. Enough **members** to be able to fill all **lay offices** in the Circuit including Circuit Stewards, Treasurer, Safeguarding Officer and Property Secretary.
4. **Finances** strong enough to employ a **Circuit Administrator**. This emerging role is increasingly significant in taking pressure off the Superintendent, other ministers and office holders. It has a key role in improving the communications within the Circuit.

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5. **The Plan** as a tool for providing **quality worship** and **intentional faith development**. With the decline of midweek activities, Sunday is increasingly important for the life of the church in providing the opportunities for teaching and nurture in the context of worship.
 - a. The Plan should enable a creative use of Sunday worship with variety of service styles and themed preaching as a basis for programmes to nurture disciples.
 - b. An effective **Local Preachers and Worship Leaders meeting** is central to this goal.
 - c. Recruitment and training of Local Preachers and Worship Leaders should be seen as priorities.
 - d. A robust **Continuing Local Preachers Development programme** is essential.
 - e. Renewed support for **Sunday School/Junior Church staff** should be provided

6. A clear **strategy for Circuit mission**. A healthy Circuit should see its role as challenging and supporting churches to discern and carry out their distinctive mission in their particular contexts.
 - a. The strategy needs to ensure that churches are individually effective in providing worship, pastoral care and nurture for their congregations.
 - b. Co-ordinated leadership and discipleship training can be developed across the Circuit if numbers in individual churches do not provide a critical mass.
 - c. A crucial part of this work is to develop links through which individual churches can contribute to each others' mission.

There are two other areas where the Circuit mission strategy is important:

- Civic and borough opportunities
- Ecumenical and other partnerships

7. A **Connexional Vision**: In a church where there is a tendency for each congregation to think only about its own needs and challenges the levels of Circuit understanding are often very low. The Connexional purpose and mission potential of the Circuit are not well understood. In London it is vital that the **Circuit renews the vision of what a Connexional church is and can be** and responds to diversity in a way that establishes a strong sense of identity between churches and people. **This final mark is the basis for all the others.**

Questions:

- How far do you agree with the Marks of a Healthy Circuit?
- Are there any you disagree with? Or any you would like to add? What are your reasons?
- In your opinion, which of these 'Marks' should be priorities for your Circuit?
- What do you think might be the important first steps to putting them in place?
- What do you think might possible factors that would prevent such action?
- In what ways do you think the Connexional Vision might be renewed?
- How well do you know the challenges facing your neighbouring circuits? In what ways might your circuit consider working together with one or more of these in order to become more 'healthy' and to support each other's mission?

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