



CIRCUIT STEWARDS INDUCTION PACK

1. INTRODUCTION

“The Circuit is the primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help... The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance.” Standing Order 500 from *The Constitution Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD)

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As this statement suggests, because the Circuit is at the heart of our life and mission, the work of the Circuit Steward is of fundamental importance for the life of the Methodist Church. Circuit Stewards are essential if the Circuit is to be effective and to fulfil its potential.

In London even more than the rest of the UK we need to develop a clear understanding of the Circuit. Many of our members have grown up in churches of other denominations or Methodist churches that organise themselves differently. As a result there is great variation in understanding of the ways that churches should be organised and different expectations of the role and responsibilities of leaders and members

This pack will outline the responsibilities of the Circuit Steward according to British Methodism and offer some resources to help you respond to those experiences.

A pack like this is a developing resource. More information on all topics mentioned here can be found on the London District website www.methodistlondon.org.uk

This pack is based on work originally developed in the Birmingham District from 2003 by: Hartmond Burgundy, David Cule, Beverley Greaves, Judy Lingard, Craig Mayo, and Charles Worth. The London District is very grateful to them and for the advice and input of Circuit Stewards from within the London District.

Circuit Stewards and ‘servant leadership’

Like so many roles in church life, being a Circuit Steward means combining the roles of service and leadership. This style of ‘servant leadership’ is based on the example of Jesus himself and presents a unique double challenge to his followers:

- Service – helping the people of God’s church work together in unity as they seek to do God’s will. That means that personal preferences and priorities must often take second place to the wider needs of the church – a very hard challenge to face.
- Responsibility – both taking responsibility yourself and by example and encouragement helping others to understand their responsibility for shaping the future, reaching fresh understandings of the changes the church has to face if it is to do God’s will and to use faithfully the gifts of people and resources that God has provided.

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That may well sound like very hard work, but servant leadership does have great rewards. This is how one Circuit Steward described his experience of the role:

As a Circuit Steward - a role to which I believe I was called, I was rewarded richly through:

- engaging, sharing and fellowship with others (both lay and ordained), collectively and individually, in the Circuit Leadership team and churches of the Circuit and also at District meetings and events;
- exercising my God given gifts and talents, many of which I had not previously recognized (specifically in relation to support of our Ministers);
- gaining a far wider perspective and appreciation of the relevance and importance of Methodism and its structures, beyond the local church;

- being challenged to think of creative and innovative ideas and ways to address the issues faced particularly by Methodism, but also the wider Church, in the 21st century, and encouraging and working with others to bring these about.

It is vital to recognise that he felt called to the role and that he was able to bring to the role of Circuit Steward his gifts and his experience of life. He was also able to develop new skills through his years as Circuit Steward. That is precisely the pattern the London District sets out to encourage. This short pack offers some guidelines to help you get the basics right. But many of the challenges ahead will need to be faced with your own special qualities and experience. You will find other resources to help you do this on the District website.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES of the CIRCUIT STEWARD – ‘JOB DESCRIPTION’

“The Circuit is the primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help... The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance. Standing Order 500 from *The Constitution Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD)

Based on that statement, CPD offers the following outlines of the role of Circuit Steward:

The Circuit Stewards are responsible, with the Superintendent and ministers, deacons and probationers appointed to the Circuit, for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting. Standing Order 531 (1) CPD

Meetings: Church Councils, Circuit Meetings and the District Synod

One Circuit Steward is appointed to a church council and at least on to the District Synod.

The Circuit Stewards are ex-officio members of and entitled to attend all official meetings connected with the Circuit. S.O.610 and S.O.410

Circuit Fund

The Circuit Stewards are the treasurers of the Circuit Fund. S.O.532

Manses

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for the interior repair and decoration and furnishing of the manses. S.O. 533

Invitations and Appointments

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for invitations to ministers and deacons to serve in the Circuit and for negotiating with ministers over appointments to the Circuit and to a chaplaincy, the pastoral oversight of youth and community work and to a team ministry. S.O. 534 and 540 (1)

Finance

It is important to establish very clear principles with the Circuit meeting about the level of Circuit Steward’s responsibility for the use of Circuit Funds. In principle, any use of Circuit funds must be agreed by the Circuit Meeting.

3. REFLECTIONS on the 'JOB DESCRIPTION'

[This section deals with the first general statement of responsibilities on page 3. Details of the other, more specific, responsibilities will be found on the District website.]

The Circuit Stewards are responsible, with the Superintendent and ministers, deacons and probationers appointed to the Circuit, for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting. Standing Order 531 (1) CPD

NOTES:

'Circuit' is a key term. It emphasises that your responsibility extends beyond your individual church in a way you may not have experienced before. There are important questions about:

- How you relate to other churches and groups in the Circuit?
- How you get to know the people of the Circuit and their concerns?
- How you make yourself available and approachable to them?

Not everyone who is called to be a Circuit Steward finds the sort of high-profile role of getting to know new people across the Circuit is one that comes naturally or easily to them. It is important to find ways of doing the job that fit your personality and ways of relating to people to help you meet that challenge.

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'Circuit Stewards' is in the plural. It is a task shared with others. These include not only your fellow Circuit Stewards, but the ministers, particularly the Superintendent, often through a Circuit Leadership Team. (Check the role of minister and Superintendent according to CPD in the Appendix or on the District Website)

The number of Circuit Stewards in a particular Circuit is decided by the Circuit. Usually the larger the Circuit the more Circuit Stewards are required to cover the work.

'Senior Circuit Steward' – most Circuits find it helpful to designate one of their Circuit Stewards as Senior Steward. This is usually someone who has been in post for a year or two to gain experience. The Senior Steward takes responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Circuit Stewards.

'with' is the vital word. Christian service is a shared experience and therefore in the Standing Order above, Teamwork is essential. Teams can be a source of real strength. They make a demanding task much easier and much more enjoyable. They can also create problems.

Two key points are worth remembering:

- Teams work most effectively when there is a strong sense of trust built on care for one another and fellowship together.
- Teams are much more complicated when full or part-time professionals (ministers and other paid employees) work together with 'volunteers' (lay people who have other jobs and major responsibilities)

'Superintendent and ministers...' Ministers in the British Methodist church are 'itinerant', initially appointed to a Circuit for a five-year period. This is a distinctive pattern inherited from Methodist origins. While there is some discussion about how effective such a system is today, and exceptions may occur, it brings special challenges to Circuit Stewards that include:

- Involvement with the Chair of District in the **stationing process** to invite ministers to serve in the Circuit.
- Supporting and enabling the ministers so that their gifts and time are best used
- Providing the continuity of witness that in other denominations may appear to be the responsibility of the clergy

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In British Methodism the leadership of lay people represented in the role of Circuit Steward, is essential for the life of the church.

'spiritual and material well-being' indicates the area of responsibility for the Circuit Steward. Both aspects need to be considered. It is all too easy to concentrate on one at the expense of the other. 'Spiritual well-being' may sound vague or even beyond the experience of many lay people. It is especially important therefore as a team to work out ways of responding to that area and not focusing all energies on property, finance or organisational matters.

'decisions of the Circuit Meeting' – whenever a meeting makes decisions that are not acted on, that body loses authority and respect. There is a responsibility therefore for making sure decisions taken are:

- Realistic
- Clear about who should take action
- Clear about timing and deadlines
- Followed up.

4. CONTEXT OF WORK:

The Circuit Steward has an important role in bringing the concerns of the Circuit to the attention of the District and the Connexion, and in the same way of bringing the concerns of the District and Connexion to the people and churches of the Circuit. Some understanding of the context of the Circuit Stewards work is essential.

The guiding principle of the way that British Methodism is organised was expressed above in the introductory statement about the Circuit as ‘the primary unit in which local churches **express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help**’. This distinctive principle of *interconnexion* or **Connexionalism** is at the heart of our life as a Methodist Church.

Over the years, the Methodist Church has carefully developed and organised the responsibilities for the life of the church. These are set out in the Constitution Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD). The detailed procedures set out there can appear complex and demanding. However, the way our Church as a whole organises itself is simple and visionary. At its heart is the word ‘Connexion’. It is a term that expresses the network to which all Methodist churches belong. It is designed to enable them to share their gifts and resources in a movement together in God’s service in our world. The first step in this network is the gathering of local churches to work together in Circuits. Circuits are then grouped to form a District. There are 31 Districts in the British Methodist Church.

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While the local context is the one where we work out our life and witness in God’s service, the Methodist Church is designed so that we are not left isolated in God’s service and can find help and support at any time. In addition, it means our horizons are not limited to merely local concerns, but that we are constantly challenged to see faith in the widest possible context.

There are a number of valuable ways in which the Connexion supports Districts, Circuits and churches:

1. The Connexional Team is based at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London. They provide the full range of resources needed by Circuits and churches. These resources can be found on the Connexional website:
www.methodistchurch.org.uk
2. By reminding us of the nature of our calling as disciples and members of the Body of Christ. This has been done most recently through ‘Our Calling’ and ‘The Priorities’. These statements are designed to help churches and Circuits to be faithful to God’s mission and to ask ‘What is God calling us to be and to do in our situation today?’

OUR CALLING, THE PRIORITIES and THE CORE VALUES

Our Calling

The calling of The Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

The Church exists to

- *increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love*
- *help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care*
- *be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice*
- *make more followers of Jesus Christ*

Conference 2000

Priorities for the Methodist Church

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world: and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

1. Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer
2. Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor – in Britain and worldwide
3. Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved
4. Encouraging fresh ways of being Church
5. Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

Conference 2004

In addition the London District Synod has agreed its own statement of its vision and goals to guide our life and work together.

5. ESSENTIAL DUITES: In Brief...

Meetings: Church Councils, Circuit Meetings and the District Synod:

One Circuit Steward is to be appointed to a Church Council and at least one to the District Synod.

The Circuit Stewards are ex officio members of and entitled to attend all official meetings connected with the Circuit.

Circuit Stewards should decide amongst themselves which of their number are to attend the various meetings and then to report back to all.

Circuit Fund and Circuit Treasurer:

The Circuit Stewards are the treasurers of the circuit fund. S.O. 532.

It is the Circuit Stewards' duty to ensure that the circuit fund is managed properly and efficiently according to current accounting principles and money management so as to comply with the obligations imposed upon them by S.O. 532. That will require one Circuit Steward of acknowledged competence to assume especial responsibility for the circuit fund or, if there is no such steward then another competent person who is directly responsible to the Circuit Stewards. (More details can be found in the Appendix)

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Manses:

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for the interior repair and decoration and furnishing of the manses: S.O. 533.

The improvement, repair, maintenance, suitability and location of manses are matters for which the circuit and District are responsible through different bodies.

(More details can be found in the Appendix)

Invitations and Appointments:

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for invitations to ministers and deacons to serve in the Circuit and for negotiating with ministers over appointments to the Circuit and to a chaplaincy, the pastoral oversight of youth and community work and to a team ministry: S.O. 534 and 540(1).

The London District provides a special pack on Stationing procedures and training days organized by the Chairs of District. (See the District website for more details)

Representing the Circuit

This role is not in CPD as such. However, in the face of the changes ahead of the Methodist Church over the next few years, the Chairs of District and the District Council will be depending more than ever on Circuit Stewards for understanding the potential of their Circuits and the challenges they face. There will be regular opportunities for the Circuit Stewards to consult with the Chairs.

Safeguarding

There are particular responsibilities for the Circuit – brief notes of them can be found in Appendix and on the District website

6. TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Circuit Stewards always need to be thinking ahead about the development of resources in the Circuit and laying foundations for the future. The following four areas need to be on the agenda of every Circuit Steward:

- **Nurturing new leaders:** One of the key roles in leadership in the church is the challenge of finding your successor and nurturing new leaders. This needs to start as soon as you take up your post, not just before you are due to retire !
- **Circuit Reviews:** It is Connexional policy that every Circuit should have undertaken a Review within the next three years. Circuit and church Reviews are a very useful tool in:
 - Taking stock of resources,
 - Reflecting on the current state of life in the church
 - Giving space to discern God's will for the future and plan for it
 - Clarifying what may need to change and how that might take place.

The London District and the Regional Learning Network have developed a number of ways of setting about Reviews.

- **Nurturing a vision of the Circuit:** Underlying a successful Circuit Review, and crucial in responding to its recommendations, is the vision of the Circuit's central place in Methodism. The Circuit Steward has a special opportunity to help recover and develop that vision. The Circuit is not an easy idea to take on board for those whose experience of church life has not already made them familiar with it. Many of those who have grown up in British Methodism have been so focused on the needs of their local church in recent years that they too have lost the vision. As Circuit Stewards it is important to take every opportunity of promoting that vision and to find new ways to help it develop. You may find it helpful to reflect on the challenges in the London District discussion document '*The Marks of a Healthy Circuit*' which is in this pack.
- **District Advance Fund:** The District Advance Fund makes regular grants to support churches and Circuits with schemes that are directed towards mission and may include funding for people, training, research, equipment and property. For more information see the Synod Directory or the District website.

7. PRAYER

In the face of the complex and demanding challenges of being an effective Circuit Steward, and the wisdom needed for such a task, time for worship and personal prayer is vital.

The way we pray varies with each individual. It is important to work to your own strength and preference. However, given the range of opportunities and responsibilities it is worthwhile making a prayer list to use briefly each day of the week to remember the people, situations and resources with which you are concerned.

In conjunction with that list, here are some prayers that other Circuit Stewards have found useful:

Lord God, I pray for the life of each church and every member and minister in my Circuit.

May we be filled with the power of your love to work together

To welcome all who come to our churches

And to reach out in justice and peace to our neighbours. Amen

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ,

For all the benefits which thou hast given us,

For all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us.

O Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,

May we know thee more clearly,

Love thee more dearly

And follow thee more nearly,

Day by day.

YOUR OWN NEEDS:

Any responsibility in the life of the church, especially one as vital as Circuit Steward with its 'servant leadership' style, makes great demands on your own spiritual resources. It is crucial to find times when you can put your concerns to one side and relax in an atmosphere and situation that enriches you spiritually. Some people go on retreat; others visit churches in other Circuits or denominations. As a Circuit Steward team it is helpful to encourage each other to find ways of being spiritually refreshed.

PART 2 – HELPFUL DOCUMENTS

1. THE DUTIES OF A CIRCUIT STEWARD? - DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS FOR A TEAM MEETING

A number of discussions with Circuit Stewards about their role in implementing the guidelines resulted in the following list:

1. Develop vision and plan for mission within the circuit, ensuring appropriate consultation
Circuit Stewards work as a team and share collective responsibility for leadership and specific duties.

From that general responsibility it follows that the circuit stewards should:

2. Exercise a general pastoral care for the circuit staff and their families
3. Meet as a leadership team at least twice a year, before the Circuit Meeting
4. Keep themselves informed of the activities of each local church
5. Be aware of District and Connexional policies affecting the circuit and its churches
6. Be sensitive to the needs of the circuit and its officers and staff
7. Inform themselves of developing movements in Methodism and the church generally
8. Be alert to and take advice on the legal consequences of their office and its responsibilities, e.g. lay employment, finance, property
9. Keep alive a vision of the Circuit and the link between Circuit and District

10. Aim to work for the unity of the church

--- and arrange in a manner suitable to the circuit how these responsibilities are exercised.

- What are your reactions to the list?
- In your opinion, is it in the correct order of priority?
- Do you think there is anything vital missing – if so what?
- Do you think there is anything that could be omitted?
- How far do you think such a role is realistic and manageable for you?

2. Duties of Minister, Superintendent and Circuit Meeting as set out in CPD

Responsibilities of ministers

The minister or ministers appointed to the several Circuits are appointed by the Conference to preach and exercise pastoral charge in those Circuits on behalf of the Conference as set out in Standing Order 700(7). In so doing they shall exercise their particular responsibilities

in conjunction with those of appropriate court and lay officers in the Circuit to which they are appointed and in the constituent local Churches of that Circuit. With them they shall act in accordance with Standing Orders 515, 531, 614 and 633 to uphold Methodist discipline and to exercise oversight of the worship, pastoral care and mission policy of the Circuit and the allocation of specific pastoral work and responsibilities to particular minister, deacons and lay officers.

Responsibilities of Superintendents

The Superintendent has the right to preside at every official meeting within the Circuit, or with any Local Church included within the Circuit, or with any committee, institution or organization having official connection with the Circuit or with any of its Local Churches. *N.B. need to appoint annually in writing deputies for Circuit Meeting, Church Councils etc.*

It is the duty of the Superintendent appointed to each Circuit to enable the relevant courts, officers, deacons and ministers to fulfill their specific responsibilities under Standing Orders and to ensure that they do so.

It is the responsibility of the Superintendent in consultation with his or her colleagues to make the Circuit Plan of preaching appointments.

The Superintendent shall also visit all the Local Churches in the Circuit to provide encouragement, challenge and support.

The Superintendent is further encouraged to gather, in conjunction with the Circuit Meeting, a group of people, who, in the name of the Circuit, may visit a Local Church which needs help in fulfilling its ministry in any way more effectively.

Circuit Meeting

The Circuit Meeting is the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of the Circuit and the development of Circuit policy. It shall exercise that combination of spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency which will enable the Circuit to fulfill its purposes as set out in Standing Order 500, and shall act as the focal point of the working fellowship of the churches in the Circuit, overseeing their pastoral, training and evangelistic work.

The meeting shall encourage leadership within the Circuit which involves the Circuit Stewards and other lay persons along with the ministers and deacons appointed to the Circuit.

3. The Financial Role of the Circuit Steward

The Circuit Fund

The Circuit Stewards are collectively treasurers of the Circuit Fund. Most circuits have one of their stewards who has the necessary skills and knowledge to take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the circuit funds. Otherwise the Circuit must secure a competent person to carry out these duties under close supervision of the stewards.

The Circuit Stewards have to present to the Circuit Meeting a forecast budget covering a 12 month period and an indication of how the costs will be met. Sometimes Circuit Projects will require long-term financial planning. Discussions with individual Church Treasurers is essential when assessing contributions from the Churches prior to presenting figures to the Circuit Meeting for its consideration. Some circuits hold a meeting of treasurers whilst other circuits approach each church treasurer on a one-to-one basis. It should always be treated as a sensitive issue.

The Circuit Stewards must ensure that stipends and agreed rates of allowances to meet circuit expenses are paid to Ministers and other staff including any Lay Workers. This will involve income tax, National Insurance, superannuation and other items of book-keeping. Accurate records must be kept.

They must maintain the payment of financial obligations as set out in the annual budget, e.g. payment to District funds, the upkeep of circuit properties (manses) etc.

The financial year is from September 1st - August 31st. The annual accounts are presented to the Circuit Meeting having been examined by a qualified person.

SO 532 states that the Circuit Stewards are the treasurers of the Circuit fund and that they should:

- i. collect assessments
- ii. provide for the stipends due to circuit staff
- iii. pay staff expenses
- iv. discharge any other financial claims on the Circuit agreed in the budget
- v. pay assessment to District Treasurers

As **SO 635** states that it is the responsibility of church Treasurers to pay the assessment set by the Circuit Meeting, there should be no problem of achieving sufficient income, providing budgeting is reasonable.

NB: The term “Circuit Treasurer” does not occur in CPD. The responsibility lies with the Circuit Stewards. However, that does not prevent the appointment of a Circuit Treasurer to provide financial support to the Circuit Stewards or an additional Circuit Steward with specific financial responsibilities, who could take the majority of the responsibility on behalf of the Circuit Stewards.

4. The Care of Manses

The duties and responsibilities of a circuit /circuit property steward

1. Obtain regular reports on the state of property and undertake renovations and repair as necessary
2. After every Quinquennial (5yr) inspection consider the findings and recommendations of the inspectors and take any action required;
3. Prepare and consider the annual property schedules, both of accounts and investments and of the state of the property, and take any action required;
4. Consider matters such as the purchase, sale, extension or alteration of the property and take appropriate action in collaboration with the District and the Connexional Property Office in Manchester;
5. Appoint or employ a caretaker of the premises, if required, and supervise his/her work;
6. Open and maintain a log book for the retention of the annual property schedules, quinquennial inspection reports and other relevant material. and periodically examine the log book and ensure that records are up to date;
7. Present an annual report on the local property to the circuit meeting and after every quinquennial inspection.

See SO 533, 803, 952, 954

In addition:

- Ensure that a Steward is appointed for each manse – best to appoint somebody who is not already a Church Property Steward.

- **Submit form (e) from the Quinquennial to the Manses Secretary / Property Committee**
- **For each manse establish a file in which to retain quinquennial reports, work sheets, invoices, inspection certificates, guarantees for work or equipment etc.**

N.B.1 CPD Book 6 General, Part 2 guidance, Section 1B provides a Charter for incoming Ministers and Deacons, and 1C for Lay Workers

N.B.2 be aware of taxation accountabilities

5. Manse Checklist

House

- Carpets cleaned

- Paintwork washed
- Curtains cleaned
- Cupboards – empty and clean
- Cooker clean- both hob and oven in good working order
- Refuse from previous occupant removed
- Any disarrangement rectified, everything restored to previous positions
- Where possible provide a list of useful names and addresses
- Ensure annual gas inspection carried out
- Provide adequate smoke detectors and fire blankets.

Garden

- Hedges and shrubs trimmed
- Lawns cut
- Beds weeded
- Rubbish removed
- Sheds clean and empty
- Garage(s) empty

IT

- PC
- Internet, preferably Broadband

6. Circuit Stewards' Required Meetings

Circuits work in different ways and have a variety of patterns of meetings. Meetings may include:

Circuit Stewards

Leadership Team

Circuit Meetings

Manses Committee

Property Committee

District Meetings

Church Councils

A circuit steward is an ex-officio member of, and entitled to attend, all official meetings connected with the circuit, except for local preachers meetings [unless they are a local preacher]. Any circuit steward is therefore entitled to attend the Church Council of any church within the circuit. A circuit steward should be appointed, by the circuit stewards, to attend each Church Council [SO 610].

The circuit steward will be able to:

- represent the circuit at the meeting
- offer information on matters relating to circuit events and circuit policy
- gather information on local church events or concerns that need to be reported back to the rest of the circuit leadership team

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District Synod [representative session]

Synod is the policy making court of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and Connexional team on one hand, and the circuits and local churches on the other.

Under SO 410 one circuit steward of each circuit in the district is a representative to synod. Each circuit also sends lay representatives: these will often include the other circuit stewards. All ministerial staff stationed in the District attend too.

At synod there are opportunities to:

- meet with representatives from other circuits

- find out what is happening in the District
- pass on information relating to the circuit
- vote on resolutions
- elect representatives to conference

The nominated steward will report back to the other circuit stewards who have not attended synod.

7. Circuit Stewards & Safeguarding

Every Circuit is responsible for ensuring that:

- All circuit officers are aware of the terms of S.O. 010 concerning the holders of office, duty and responsibilities within the circuit.
- An appropriate Circuit Policy is implemented.
- a Circuit Safeguarding Officer is appointed, according to the job description provided by the District
- There is access to basic child protection training and training in working with children and young people for all voluntary and paid workers with children and young people
- All churches must have a safeguarding policy *which meets the requirements laid down by the Methodist Safeguarding guidelines*. The Circuit must have a copy of each policy.
- All ministers – diaconal and presbyteral – must have been subject to an Enhanced CRB check.
- All local preachers and Circuit officers have signed a self-disclosure form.
- If there are circuit groups or events, make sure the circuit policy is implemented

For further information about Safeguarding procedures, please refer to the manual “Safeguarding”, or to www.methodistlondon.org.uk.

See also [Churches’ Agency for Safeguarding](#) (CAS) or the [Methodist Children](#) website.

For advice on particular incidents, talk to a member of the District Safeguarding Group.

8. A Brief Guide to Methodism

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local church means both the people and the buildings within which they meet and build their community. It is the whole body of members of the Methodist Church linked with one particular place of worship.

Local churches (about 6,000 in England, Scotland and Wales) are grouped into **Circuits** (600+), each having a **Circuit Superintendent**. Circuits are grouped into **Districts** (35) led by a **District Chair**.

Some church members belong to the Church Council either because the local church members have elected them, or because they hold one of a number of offices in the local church.

THE CIRCUIT

Local churches in a defined area are usually grouped together into a 'Circuit'.

The purpose of the Circuit is to use effectively the resources of people, property and finance for the mission of the church.

The responsibilities of the Circuit are exercised through the Circuit Meeting. Its task is to combine spiritual leadership with administrative efficiency to help the Circuit fulfil its purpose.

The Superintendent of the Circuit and the Circuit Stewards have special leadership responsibilities.

THE DISTRICT

In each of the 32 Districts in the British Methodist Church there is a 'Chair of District' (EXCEPT LONDON, which has three Chairs!) whose job is to lead the ministers and lay people in the mission of the church and to support them pastorally.

Each District has a 'District Synod' that meets twice a year. Its purpose is to decide policy for the District and to be the link between the Conference and central offices of the Church on the one hand and the Circuits and local churches on the other. Church members become members of the District Synod either because they have been elected or because they hold one of a number of offices in the District or Circuit.

THE CONNEXION

This is the term used to describe the Methodist Church linked together through Circuits and Districts. Together these form the 'Connexion'.

The post of **General Secretary** provides overall co-ordination and strategic direction to the Connexion's work, under the guidance of the **Methodist Council**, a representative body.

The policy-making body of the Methodist Church is the annual **Conference** to which the Districts send elected representatives both lay and ordained.

The **Connexion** is served nationally by the Connexional Team based at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Rd, London NW1 5JR (020 7486 5502).

THE METHODIST CONFERENCE

The governing body of the Methodist Church is the Methodist Conference which meets annually in different parts of the country. Some church members belong to the Conference either because they have been elected or because they hold one of a number of offices within the Methodist Church nationally.

The **President** of Conference who is a minister, and the **Vice-President** who is always a layperson lead the Conference. They are elected and serve for one year.

Further Information: www.methodistchurch.org.uk

9. Marks of a Healthy Circuit: a discussion starter

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.
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 these Circuits consider working together to become more 'healthy' and support each other's mission?