

**Aim of the session**

To encourage discussion about fundamental issues faced by churches and circuits within Methodism today

**Case study 1**

Corfield is the smallest church in the Circuit, with a congregation of 15 on a good day. It is only two miles from Trinity, which is the largest church, and growing. At Trinity, the Superintendent Minister has been successful in recruiting younger people as Worship Leaders and Local Preachers in response to the District Challenge. As a result, he has more than can be used regularly at Sunday worship.

He has agreed with the Circuit Leadership Team that a small group of Worship Leaders and Local Preachers will work as a 'Worship Team' and lead Sunday morning worship at Corfield once a month in order to gain experience. A senior Local Preacher will accompany them.

About six months later you are approached at the Circuit Meeting by one of the Corfield Stewards who asks, "Can you do something about the Worship Team? We know the Superintendent is keen to help them grow and get experience, but we just don't like the way they do things."

- How would you reply?
- What more might you want to know?
- What action might you take?
- What concerns are there for the Circuit?

**Case study 2**

Christchurch is a small church of about twenty regular members, the majority from three families. They are deeply committed and have kept the building in good repair. The last ten years have seen no real growth in numbers and the members have recognised that it is likely the church will have to close and have had serious discussions about it on two occasions.

Recently a major development of mixed private and low-cost housing has begun on the site of an old factory nearby. In two or three years, Christchurch will be at the heart of a large new community.

The congregation is not sure how to respond. Their energy levels are low and they do not feel they have the resources to cope with the possible challenges and the changes they might bring. The senior Church Steward asks your advice, and what the Circuit might do to help.

- What would you reply?
- What action might you take?
- In what ways can you imagine the Circuit might help?

**Case study 3**

James is the youngest son of one of the families at a church in your Circuit. He is a member of the church, helps at Sunday School and is doing his GCSEs. He has chosen to do a project on 'Methodism today' for one of his courses. He asks to talk with you and explains that he has had a lot of information from the Minister about the history and the organization of Methodism, but would like to talk to you as someone who is a lay person in a leadership position.

He asks:

- Why are you a Methodist?
- Why is the Circuit useful?
- What difficulties do you find with it?
- What is the future of Methodism in your opinion?
- What do you say to him?

#### Case study 4

Rachel and Sally are in their late twenties, and the two youngest Local Preachers in your Circuit. They worship at different churches. They are enthusiastic and committed. Stephen is in his early thirties with a young family. He attended Conference three years ago and was invited to take part in a small Connexional group thinking about the future of Methodism. He has become very committed

to *The Priorities* as a way forward for the church, and recently agreed, a little reluctantly, because he has a demanding job, to become a Circuit Steward.

At the last Circuit meeting he raised the question of how churches might begin to engage with the Priorities and was asked to do some research on possibilities. He reports back to the Circuit Leadership Team that he visited Church Stewards and ministers in the Circuit but could find no real enthusiasm or practical responses from the churches. He is aware that he has given a lot of time to this and family life is suffering. He thinks he may need to resign as Circuit Steward.

The Superintendent reports that Sally is considering moving to another Circuit where there are more younger people as she has been made aware that her style of leading worship is not always appreciated. Rachel's minister says she is very disappointed that her attempts to get a prayer group started in her church have not worked out.

- How would you respond to these issues?
- What might the Circuit do to help?

#### Case study 5

Eastwood is a six church circuit in London. There are two ministers, and the churches are fairly strong in membership although the congregations are aging and a sense of struggle is creeping in to some of them. There are numbers of energetic new members in two of the churches, Zion's Hill and Emmanuel, but they do not come from a British Methodist background.

At Zion's Hill, many come from West Africa and still have strong links with Ghana and Nigeria.

Emmanuel is near a large hospital and university residences and attracts students from South Africa and the Philippines.

Much of Peter's work during his last three years as Superintendent has been to push through a major building scheme at Wesley's, a church near a large and growing shopping centre. Although the membership there is smaller than the others Peter has persuaded the Circuit to give financial support because of the mission opportunities that might be developed with the shoppers and the small groups of homeless who gather at the Centre.

Peter is about to leave. The building project has been held up for a variety of reasons, the original costs have increased by a third and work will not start till Peter's successor has arrived.

Meanwhile one of the other churches (High Street) has seen an increase in membership through an Alpha course. There is a strong proposal to develop work in the church by appointing a Youth and Young Adults Worker to be based there who might also work with other churches in the Circuit. A proposal from Zion's Hill is to appoint a lay worker to do pastoral work with its members and the

large numbers of older people in their neighbourhood.

A major discussion has developed in the Circuit. It has been suggested by some that the money for the building project could be better spent on youth work. Others have raised the question about why money from their church should support a building project somewhere else in the Circuit when they have immediate needs of their own. Another group has said that work with older people is desperately needed in the wider community as well as the church and that is where Circuit resources should go. There are still those who see a high profile building project as the way forward.

- Where might you stand on these issues, and for what reasons?
- How might you argue the case for each of the sorts of projects proposed?
- As Circuit Steward, what would you advise Peter and the Circuit Leadership Team to do?