

The Methodist Church

Lincolnshire Methodist District

Serving locally, connecting the county

Local Preachers' and Worship Leaders' Strategy Group

During the past 7 years the LP/WL Strategy Group has met regularly and reflected on the role and development of LPs. As the group finds itself changing in nature and membership we felt it right to put in writing some of those reflections which may help some circuits as they look to re shaping for mission and wondering how issues concerning plan making, pastoral oversight and development of discipleship can be addressed with shrinking resources.

The role of the LP:

The group has been enhanced by the presence of the Warden of Anglican Readers until the last two years. It became clear as we tried to do things ecumenically that there was a big difference between the role of an Anglican lay reader and a LP. The former, although assigned to one congregation, had a much broader brief than the latter and this has led us to consider if we may not be under using the resource we have in our LPs.

They have a theological understanding and Biblical knowledge that exceeds that of most of our Methodist membership, yet we use them for a very limited task of leading worship and preaching up to 6/7 times a quarter. Often this is to very small congregations who dislike anything challenging, creative or 'different'. They can become quite disheartened and sometimes see themselves as 'plan fillers'.

Imagine a different scenario, one where a small group of preachers worked alongside a church or group of smaller churches with the task of preaching regularly in those churches and leading small groups for fellowship, Bible study and prayer.

Lack of leadership of such groups is one reason some churches cannot sustain this vital discipleship building aspect of church life, yet we have trained obvious leaders and under use them.

The structure of our worship life:

Preaching to tiny congregations would be no problem at all if those same groups of people saw themselves as a 'small group' or cell, but too often they are seen as congregations and we take the expected 'hymn sandwich' leaving both congregation and preacher dissatisfied.

Imagine another different scenario, one where small groups in a village/community meet midweek for fellowship, Bible study and prayer in a church building (if also used for outreach and community activities) or in someone's home. Then on Sunday they join with other groups from other communities in a larger worship - the same building every Sunday so everyone knows where and when worship happens and a sense of community can be built.

What a difference this would make to plan making. Fewer pulpits to fill, more opportunity for consistent preaching especially if using LPs more locally.

Re shaping for mission has been on our lips for a number of years, perhaps if we are serious about it we need to reshape our LP system and church/worship structure to free up time and

enthusiasm and people. But even if we are purely into maintaining a Christian presence we will need to reshape for maintenance, for the present structure will be unsustainable.

Supporting our Leaders of worship

As well as looking at the bigger picture and to how the church may be organised and expertise utilised the group have also been concerned with ensuring our LPs and WLs are ready to lead worship in the Church of the 21st century

This work has included

- The creation and delivery of an innovative approach to LP training
- Regular development days and sessions for leaders of worship
- Working with ecumenical colleagues on joint initiatives
- Regular newsletters for LP meetings and
- very local initiatives as requested by circuits and churches

This group has consistently considered the importance of worship in our churches and how to best support those called to lead worship and wish to see continued commitment to them and their development.

God is still calling people to be LP's, he still has a purpose and plan for Methodism. It may not however be in the shape we have grown used to - we may have to explore new ways of structuring our worship, church life and use of LPs.

Rev Liz Childs (chair) in consultation with Jane Bingham, Lorna Valentine, Jane Lloyd and Ruth Constant

If you have any interest in exploring these issues further do contact Liz, Jane Lloyd or Ruth.

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