**Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire Methodist District**

**Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Affirmations Scheme**

The Methodist Church’s Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity challenges every church to “demonstrate how it is inclusive and also how it proposes to develop”.

This will be done through an Affirmations scheme to “capture good practice” and “encourage churches, Circuits and Districts to go forward”. Many people have found, within the Methodist Church, a place where they are loved and belong and experience the all-inclusive love of Christ, and we need to celebrate that and publicise it. We also need to look at the strategies that have been put in place in churches so that we can learn from them.

Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire are running a pilot Affirmations scheme.

* We invite every church community in the District to read this guidance and complete the **self-assessments checklists** to reflect on justice, dignity and solidarity within your own churches.
* Some of us may complete all three checklists. For others, starting with just one may be more appropriate. It is important to do what is right for your church community.
* We invite you to consider what happens in your church community that could be affirmed and celebrated. We invite you to consider how your church community could further develop.
* We then invite every church community to take part in the District Affirmations scheme by contacting the Learning Network at watkins@methodistchurch.org.uk to arrange for an affirmation of your church.

**Justice**

Justice is more than just the avoidance of discrimination. We are called to treat everyone equitably. This requires us to be reflective and intentional in ensuring everyone is taken into consideration. Justice is just about **what** we do, it is about **how** we do it. So the focus is on process.

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8

*Example:*

*A church runs a pantomime every year. In deciding the upcoming pantomime for next year, they recognised that in recent years a lot of the roles for women had been quite stereotypical. So they intentionally picked their next script to have interesting, leading roles for women. They could have picked the same show simply because they liked the songs. It was the process of reflection that was important, not just the final choice.*

*Example:*

*A church has a very diverse congregation in terms of ethnicity. They run a food hub and provide cultural food that is not available locally at affordable prices. Following a community audit, they realised that they were not catering to a significant group in their community who were not represented in their congregation. So they started providing translations into those languages in the food pantry and engaging with the community as to what food items they would like, so that no groups were excluded from the church’s outreach just because they weren’t represented in the church’s congregation.*

**Self-assessment checklist**

* **Have you completed a community audit?1**
* **Have you completed an Equality Impact Assessment for the work of your church community?2**
* **Have you implemented any changes from the audit or assessment process?**
* **Have you publicised your audit and assessment process, so that what you do is perceived by others as just?**
* **Do you work for justice in wider society? For example, working for justice for refugees by becoming a Church of Sanctuary?3**

Want to know more?

* 1The Methodist Church has published an example of a community audit process as part of the mission-planning resource “Our Church’s Future Story”: [our-church-s-future-story.pdf (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/24970/our-church-s-future-story.pdf)
* 2The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment to be used at all levels of the church: [Equality Impact Assessment (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/equality-impact-assessment/)
* 3The Methodist Church has published information on becoming a Church of Sanctuary: [Church of Sanctuary (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/church-of-sanctuary/)

**Dignity**

Treating people with dignity is more than just ensuring that no-one is excluded. It is about the quality of treatment people receive. If people’s physical needs are met, but in a way that leads to feeling like a burden or marked as different from a perceived norm, then people are not being treated with dignity. We are called to recognise the image of God in one another. We accept one another on their own terms, without expecting each other to conform to our assumptions.

“Just as you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me.”

Matthew 25:40

*Example:*

*A church trained their welcome team to ask people if they wanted large print books, rather than waiting for people to ask for them. A younger adult arriving at the church for the first time commented that at other churches, when they’d asked for a large print text, they were challenged as to why they needed one, because they needed to be saved for older people. So to be offered one without having to ask made them feel valued and welcomed for the first time.*

*Example:*

*A minister conducted a funeral for someone who was non-binary. The death certificate recorded their legal sex, which had to be the same as their birth certificate. However, the language used during the service reflected their non-binary gender identity. The legal requirements did not prevent the service from treating the person who had died with dignity.*

**Self-assessment checklist**

* **Have you completed a hospitality audit?4**
* **What training do you provide to welcome stewards? Does it include training in Unconscious Bias or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?5**
* **Do you have microphones? Do you insist that they are used?**
* **If there is projection, *c*an people see the screen? Are the font and background legible, not just on the computer but once projected?6**
* **Do you have large print text resources available?6**
* **Is inclusive language used?7**
* **Is it ok to interrupt the worship to inform that you can’t see or hear clearly? How is this done? During worship, who is responsible for checking audio-visual resources are working effectively?**
* **Is there physical access to buildings for those who have mobility issues?8**

Want to know more?

* 4The Methodist Church has published a Hospitality Audit: [First Impressions Count - Methodist Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/welcome-and-invitation/first-impressions-count/)
* 5The Methodist Church has published free training on Unconscious Bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion on its online learning platform MCBX: [MCBX (theologyx.com)](https://mcb.theologyx.com/)
* 6The Methodist Church has published guidance on improving the accessibility of documents and resources: [How to create accessible resources (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/accessibility/how-to-create-accessible-resources/)
* 7The Methodist Church has published an Inclusive Language Guide: [The Methodist Inclusive Language Guide](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/the-methodist-inclusive-language-guide/)
* 8The Methodist Church has published guidance on completing an access audit: [A-Z Property Guidance (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/a-z-property-guidance/).
* 8The Methodist Church has also published an example access audit as part of the EDI Toolkit on Disability and Impairment: [edi-toolkit-4-0923.pdf (d1yuutt686hfi0.cloudfront.net)](https://d1yuutt686hfi0.cloudfront.net/media/documents/edi-toolkit-4-0923.pdf).
* 8The Methodist Church has also published comprehensive further guidance on access to church buildings: [Widening the Eye of the Needle: Access to Church Buildings for People with Disabilities](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Widening-Eye-Needle-Buildings-Disabilities/dp/0715140612)

**Solidarity**

Demonstrating solidarity with those who have experienced injustice requires us to recognise the impact that exclusion and discrimination have on one another. Those who have been excluded are aware of unspoken cues that people like them don’t belong and aren’t welcome, or are welcome as guests, not as equals. We are called to more than just criticising injustice; we are called to provide sanctuary to those who have experienced it. This means being intentional in ensuring all are included in every aspect of church life.

“God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him”

Acts 10:34-35

*Example:*

*At a connexional event, a group of people who didn’t know one another were introducing themselves, and saying which circuits and districts they were members of. A white man asked a Black woman “Where are you from?” She asked “What do you mean by that?” He replied that he was asking which part of the country she was from. She explained that the phrase “Where are you from?” is often asked of Black people, as a way of denying their Britishness by implying they must be ‘from’ somewhere else, so when he used it she immediately became sensitive as to whether that was happening to her again. Rather than being defensive or asking her to apologise for making a false assumption about him, the man thanked her for helping him to learn something he had not known before.*

*Example:*

*A ten-year-old boy asked to join the Church Council. The minister said that, unfortunately, since Church Council members were trustees, he could not legally be a trustee. However, the Church Council invite him to every meeting and ensure his views have been heard before making all decisions. When the Church Council consulted members of the congregation on an important decision, his name was given in the notices as one of the people to whom everyone could give their views. He is not just asked to represent the views of the other children but plays a full role in leading the conversations within the church.*

**Self-assessment checklist**

* **Is your church congregation representative of your community? Are your Church Council, leadership team or stewards representative of your church community? Are you aware which groups are under-represented?9**
* **Do you state which groups are under-represented when advertising roles?**
* **Do you share agendas of church meetings with the whole congregation in advance, and encourage people who may not be able to attend the meetings to share their viewpoints?**
* **Have you completed an Equality Impact Assessment on how a range of voices are represented in your church decision-making process?10**
* **Have all leaders in your church completed Unconscious Bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training?11**

Want to know more?

* 9The Methodist Church has published guidance on a process for discerning and meeting accessibility support needs: [Accessibility support needs for volunteers and employees (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/accessibility/accessibility-support-needs-for-volunteers-and-employees/)
* 10The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment to be used at all levels of the church: [Equality Impact Assessment (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/equality-impact-assessment/)
* 11The Methodist Church has published free training on Unconscious Bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion on its online learning platform MCBX: [MCBX (theologyx.com)](https://mcb.theologyx.com/)

**The Body of Christ**

“The body does not consist of one member but many … God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose … there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together”

1 Corinthians 12: 14,18,25-26

There is no hierarchy of discrimination.

The attitudinal, cultural and structural changes required to ensure justice, dignity and solidarity for one group of people who have been marginalised, cannot be separated from the changes required to ensure justice, dignity and solidarity for all.

Everyone is an individual with a different intersection of characteristics and a unique lived experience.

We invite you to consider the experience of people within your church community in terms of our differences in:

* Age
* Care leaver status
* Carer status
* Disability and impairment
* Ethnicity
* Experiences of abuse and trauma
* Expression of ministry
* Family size and structure
* Gender identity
* Length of time within a church
* Levels of education
* Marital and relationship status
* Nationality
* Pregnancy and maternity status
* Religious belief
* Roles within a church community
* Refugee status
* Sex
* Sexual orientation
* Socio-economic class
* and any other differences that are relevant within your context