

A note from the Vice-President

In my former role as Training and Development Officer in the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District I was privileged to work alongside those with responsibility in Circuits for the 'Mapping a Way Forward: *Regrouping for Mission*' process. There was new territory to be explored, and we sometimes felt we were explorers without a compass!



Over the past three years, District Development Enablers have acquired skills and experience in the mapping process, some of which are helpfully drawn together in this booklet. Members of Circuit leadership teams will find it a useful tool to aid their assessment of the effectiveness of their Circuit as they strive to live up to Methodist Standing Order 500, which begins:

"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".

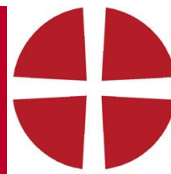


May you experience many blessings in the work you do as you co-operate in God's Mission.

Ruth Pickles

Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2011

A Circuit Shaped for Mission



Healthy Circuits

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A Circuit shaped for Mission



A Healthy Circuits Handbook

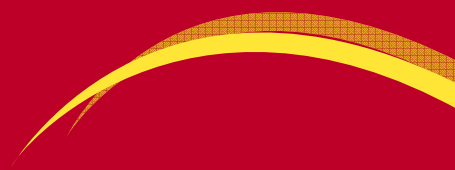
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This document may be freely copied, but copies may also be obtained from your District Development Enabler, or downloaded from

www.newcastlemethodistdistrict.org/healthycircuit.pdf

Healthy Circuits



(46 - 56) **God's properties and our stewardship: resources of discipleship and mission:** evaluate the rich stock and heritage of our buildings, create good endings, redevelopment for mission, reinvigorate community engagement

(51) God's properties and our stewardship. We are at our best when we regard our 'plant' as resources for God's mission rather than an inheritance to be preserved like the family silver. A more sacrificial, strategic approach is needed. What kind of spaces do we need to be the discipleship, missional movement that God wants us to be in the twenty-first century? Do we need to own them all?..... Can we encourage each other to release God's resources for the calling of discipleship and mission today with glad and thankful hearts?

(57 - 64) **God's 'worship' and our worship**

(65 - 70) **Evangelism ... making more disciples of Jesus Christ:** adopt radically different ways to make disciples, provide professional, relevant resources

(71 - 72) **The rich landscape of partnerships in the work of God**

(73 - 74) **Ecumenical Partnerships**

(75 - 79) **The Methodist 'family'**

(80 - 81) **Wider Ecumenism**

Martyn Atkins
General Secretary

Some significant extracts from "Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission."

(The General Secretary's Report to Conference 2011)

(6) The themes I focus upon this year are those I suggest will best help the chosen direction of travel and will enable Methodism to become a better discipleship movement shaped for mission in the immediate future.

(12) The sharp challenge before us now is the extent to which we are willing to continue to reshape our life together in faithful obedience to God - locally, in Circuits, Districts, regions, and in terms of the whole Connexion - for the sake of the world.

(14) There is always a fertile period for making hard choices which must not be missed, a finite season in which the varied resources and energy needed to implement necessary decisions are available... I judge that the fertile season when we are able to properly implement the kind of decisions we need to make, is fast coming to an end.

Themes :

(31-45) **Patterns of ministry: discipleship and mission:** Bold re-imagining of the ministries we require, lay and ordained

(34) The resourcing of Circuits ministry/leadership teams.

These teams of lay and ordained leaders have, in many places, already begun to engage in new opportunities and challenges presented by local contexts, changing patterns of resources and by implementing the *Regrouping for Mission* initiative. In many places Circuit teams are taking seriously the commitment to outward-facing, world-transforming discipleship beginning in their own locality, resulting in a host of healthy ministries, projects and initiatives. Encouragement, training and support of such enabling leadership in our Church are now discipleship and mission fertile and therefore a priority.



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Introduction

How can Methodist Circuits be useful to a God who has a mission?

As District Development Enablers in the north of England, we realised that, as we worked with Circuits to discern the way forward in developing the *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission* Connexional initiative, we were coming across the same comments and challenges, as well as having the joys of sharing in hopes and dreams for the future. We are encouraged by the prayer offered up as the Church seeks God's guidance for this journey.

Some people saw the fact that there was no 'blue-print' that we could follow to be a difficult issue; others felt freed up to be creative in their thinking. This ***Healthy Circuits Handbook*** is designed not only as an aid to creative thinking, but also as a means for Circuits to evaluate themselves, in order to take steps on a regular basis to increase their health. It offers guidance on areas that need to be considered by Circuits and provides examples of how this may be achieved.

The Handbook can be downloaded from www.newcastlemethodistdistrict.org/healthycircuit.pdf which will contain the most up to date version, together with other stories of these principles in use in our circuits.



Using the handbook

The seven 'Marks' of a Healthy Circuit identified in this handbook provide what is intended to be a facilitated, reflective process for use by Circuits to consider on their missional context and the resources that God has given them. Experience of this kind of process has shown that it works best when facilitated by a person skilled in helping groups (District Development Enablers can advise here).

Along with the seven Marks of a Healthy Circuit, we have included a number of stories to illustrate the ways in which these marks are being developed in a wide variety of contexts. It is not intended that the stories relate directly to the individual marks, indeed they should not do so because the marks are to be seen as a whole rather than individually.

To help in the process of reflection we have included score sheets for each mark in the back of the handbook. The evidence for each mark will be at least as important as the scores given.

This booklet has been inspired by *The Healthy Churches' Handbook* by Robert Warren

Key themes

Has clear aims that are specific and which are reviewed annually

Has policies to cover matters that are required by law or by the governance bodies of the Church

Reviews the policies on an annual basis, and has a named person for each policy

Produces an Annual Report that is stimulating, informative and complies with charity requirements

Has a designated pastor for every community



Mark 7

Is effective in dealing with matters of governance and legislation

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Key themes

Nurtures mutual learning and development

Identifies the gifts, and values the developmental needs, of each individual

Identifies and develops potential leaders

Provides opportunities and funding for training and staff development

Looks beyond the Circuit, when appropriate



Mark 6

Develops, trains and supports

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Healthy Circuits

The bigger the group the more representative the scores will be, and there will be a wider range of evidence. What is most important is the prayerful consideration of the overall picture that emerges from the score sheets rather than the individual scores.

In coming to a score for each Mark you might like to reflect on the descriptors individually and score each one separately before coming to an overall figure. Alternatively you may like to respond in a rather more instinctive manner, with a single overall score for the Mark. Which way you choose does not really matter so long as you yourself are consistent.

Finally, we suggest that it is not the statistics that will be gathered through this exercise that are the most significant part of the work, rather the process of reflecting, analysing and prayerfully considering God's way forward for nurturing discipleship in the individual context that is most important.

Please copy as many score sheets as are needed for use in your particular context. Photocopiable A4 versions are downloadable from www.newcastlemethodistdistrict.org/healthyscores.pdf

Seven Marks of a Healthy Circuit

A Healthy Circuit ...

Mark 1 Supports and resources mission

- Has an overarching concern for those outside our churches
- Focuses on how the Circuit and its Local Churches may share the love of God with others by ministering to the communities it serves or could serve
- Works with Local Churches to discern the mission priorities in the local contexts and beyond
- Works in partnership with other denominations and fellowships, and is engaged appropriately with other community partners
- Allocates resources strategically in support of its agreed priorities
- Enables a continuing focus through groups or individuals at Circuit level on its agreed mission priorities
- Engages in, and encourages Local Churches to engage in, a cycle of annual review of mission priorities, including an evaluation of aims and how they have been met
- Reviews its mission statement in the Circuit Meeting at least every five years
- Gives attention to areas where new work should be begun and fragile work sustained

Key themes

Prepared to adapt in response to God's missional call.

Circuit structures are driven by agreed mission priorities

The Circuit Meeting provides spiritual and practical leadership

Relates effectively to structures larger than the circuit, in mutual dependency

Continually reviews the property requirement

Uses its financial resources to support mission priorities

Utilises an appropriate staffing blend, including lay and ordained, paid and voluntary

Provides effective, visionary and collaborative leadership



Mark 5

Uses an effective structure and administration

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Key themes

Offers a variety of styles and opportunities for worship throughout the week

Nurtures discipleship and promotes faith and spiritual development

Provides for worship which is appropriate to the missional context, using teams of preachers who have the gift of relevance for a particular context

Provides opportunities for nurturing the discipleship of those involved in leading worship



Mark 4

Provides worship and other opportunities for nurturing discipleship

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Healthy Circuits

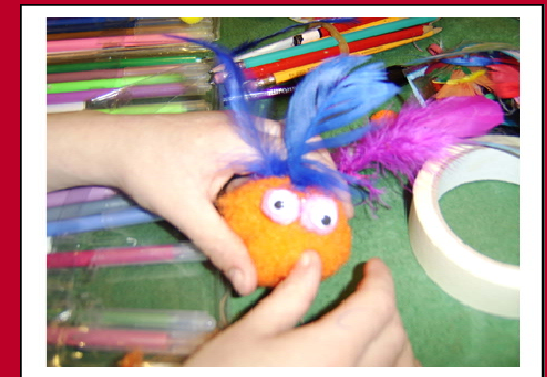
Mark 1

Supports and resources mission

A local story

Hope 2008 led to increased ecumenical involvement in Willington, near Durham. This led in turn to support from the local district council to a community festival, a Christmas tree festival and shop window decorating competition in 2009, which has united the town and shopkeepers. The 'Hope' group introduced Messy Church in four schools and has been approached by one primary school to go in weekly to talk about Christianity.

Within a year, this developed into a really fruitful relationship, with exciting possibilities for the future.



Mark 2

Has an outward looking focus

- Is passionate and prophetic about, and actively engaged with, justice and peace, locally and globally
- Is engaged with political issues, and speaks out for Gospel values by cultivating dialogue with all political parties
- Works in partnership (where possible without a conflict of interest) with secular groups and networks, and with those of other faiths
- Encourages Local Churches to develop appropriate policies and practices to conserve the environment, and does so itself
- Relates effectively to other agencies

Key themes

- Provides effective, collaborative leadership
- Has a staff, which meets weekly, for mutual support, encouragement and worship
- Constantly assesses the roles of the staff team in the light of its gifts and skills, and the mission context
- Adopts a variety of approaches to ministry
- Encourages oversight of the churches by lay and ordained collaboratively
- Ensures that all people in the Circuit feel able to be heard and valued
- Resources the Circuit Meeting so that helps it to make effective policy
- Is effective at implementing change



Mark 3

Has an effective Circuit leadership team

Excellent Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Key themes

Is passionate and prophetic about, justice and peace, locally and globally

Is engaged with political issues, and speaks out for Gospel values

Works in partnership with secular other groups and networks

Acts on environmental conservation

Relates effectively to other agencies



Mark 2
Has an outward looking focus

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Mark 2

Has an outward looking focus

A local story

In 2008, the Noah’s Ark Family Centre was opened in Thornaby, near Stockton. The church worship centre remains, providing a place for contemplation and worship, while the rest of the building houses a soft play centre, a healthy food café, and a number of rooms for use by community groups. Outside, there is an adventure play area. During its first year 18,000 children and adults passed through the building. A new congregation has developed meeting around lunch time on a Sunday.



Mark 3

Has an effective Circuit leadership team, consisting of ordained and lay people, which meets frequently to pray and worship together

- Provides effective, visionary leadership in a collaborative style
- Has a staff team of lay and ordained people which meets frequently, in a locally appropriate way, for mutual support and encouragement and for worship
- Constantly assesses the roles of the staff team in the light of their individual gifts and skills, and the mission context, and encourages the gifts to be shared appropriately across the Circuit as well as in the local context
- Adopts a variety of approaches to ministry, in support of the agreed mission priorities
- Encourages collaborative and collegial oversight of the Local Churches by lay and ordained people, both at Circuit and Local Church level, so that such shared leadership effectively supports worship, pastoral care and the mission policy
- Ensures that all people in the Circuit feel able to be heard and valued by the Circuit leadership team, and responds creatively to new ideas
- Resources the Circuit Meeting in a way that helps it to make effective policy
- Is effective at implementing change, and helping Local Churches to face the cost of change

Key themes

Is concerned for those outside our churches

Focuses on sharing the love of God with others by ministering to its communities

Discerns mission locally and beyond

Works in partnership with others

Allocates resources strategically

Engages in annual review and evaluation

Reviews its mission statement at least every five years

Both begins new work and sustains existing fragile work



Mark 1

Supports and resources local mission

Excellent

Poor

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Evidence to support the above assessment...

Appendix 3 Resources

Warren, Robert, *The Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 2004, Church House Publishing

Schwarz, Christian A., *Natural Church Development*, 2005, Church Smart Resources

Church and community audits

<http://www.faithworks.info/SubSection.asp?id=641>

Healthy Circuit criteria and assessment forms from Northampton District

<http://www.methodistdistrict23.org.uk/awffm.htm>

'The Missional Nature of the Circuit' in 2008 Faith and Order Conference Report

www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf08_17_1_FO_report_appendixA1_MissionalNatureofCircuit.doc

Called to Love and Praise – adopted by the Methodist Conference 1999

www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/ec-called-to-love-and-praise240908.doc

Safeguarding links

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=churchlife.content&cmid=1196>

Local Preachers being local <http://the-kneeler.blogspot.com> 8 Feb 2011

Disciple Course www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod

[The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity - Imagine ...](http://www.licc.org.uk/imagine/resources/)

... to awaken the imagination of individuals and churches about whole-life discipleship

www.licc.org.uk/imagine/resources/

Healthy Circuits

Mark 3

Has an effective Circuit leadership team, consisting of ordained and lay people, which meets frequently to pray and worship together

A local story

Cheshire South Circuit was created from four previous circuits in 2010, bringing together 37 churches. The new lay and ordained staff team comprised 16 working flexibly across the Circuit. Creating a larger staff team has been hugely important in shaping the future.

Local Churches have been grouped into 'Mission areas' where two or three churches work together and are supported by teams who live locally.



Mark 4

Provides worship and other opportunities for nurturing discipleship

- Offers creative styles and provides different opportunities for worship throughout the week so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in corporate worship
- Nurtures discipleship and promotes faith and spiritual development across the Circuit and in the local contexts
- Provides for worship which is appropriate to the missional context, using teams of preachers (both Presbyters and Local Preachers) and Worship Leaders (where appointed) who reflect theologically, plan and work collaboratively, and have the gift of relevance for a particular context
- Provides opportunities for nurturing the discipleship of those involved in leading worship

Appendix 2

What might a 'Healthy Circuit' look like on the ground?

You may feel that your Circuit is currently healthy, and is able to achieve all that is outlined in the statements on the previous pages, and that the current shape of your Circuit is the most appropriate for the next decade. However, you may feel that your Circuit needs to be a different shape, and there are several ways in which this could be achieved. These are not mutually exclusive and some Circuits may adopt two or more of these models at the same time. Neither are they in any order of priority.

A realignment of local church groupings to create a new Circuit

This is one response to the request of Conference to bring together whole, and/or parts of, Circuits or to regroup Local Churches into new Circuits.

A Federation of Circuits

A Federation is a group of Circuits working together to gain mutual benefit through the sharing of expertise, staff, volunteers or resources across a larger structure, while retaining autonomy in some or all areas.

An Ecumenical United Area

An Ecumenical or United Area is a group of churches from different denominations (see Methodist Standing Order 512 for further details) which replaces the Circuit.

A Circuit with one or two large churches as a hub for smaller churches

Large churches have formal relationships with particular smaller churches, which could range from sharing worship and events to operating under one Church Council. This could offer benefits to all churches, enjoying each other's strengths.

A number of Mission Partnerships

Mission Partnerships are groups of churches that work together, often with a discrete Ministry Team, some shared Officers and one Church Council, sharing their resources to further the mission of the individual churches and the partnership.

Appendix 1 Vision, leadership and growth

How do we get involved with God in growing our Local Churches and Circuits?

In 2003 in Peter Brierley's booklet, *Leadership, Vision and Growing Churches*, Christian Research published the results of a wide-ranging survey on why churches grow. They went to four thousand churches, from all of the major denominations, which had either significantly grown or significantly declined in the past ten years. Both groups were asked the same series of questions and the answers were compared to pinpoint any significant differences. They also asked the ministers of the congregations to complete a series of questions that indicated the gifts they brought to their leadership role. Amongst a number of interesting conclusions was the clear recognition that ***vision and leadership are absolutely critical to growth.***

How does a leader get his or her vision? Sometimes from talking with other people. Sometimes from the Holy Spirit's leading through prayer and meditation. Sometimes as he or she sees the needs in the community. Sometimes by answering questions such as 'Why does this church exist?', 'What will it have become in ten years' time?' or 'What is the most important thing to change this year?'

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 AV). Vision is thus not an option; it is the key factor without which Local Churches and Circuits are unlikely to grow.

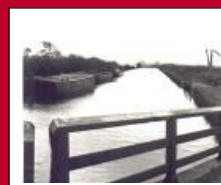
Mark 4

Provides worship and other opportunities for nurturing discipleship

A local story

In the Sankey Valley Circuit (Liverpool District) it has been recognised that one of the major missional opportunities that the circuit has is Sunday morning worship, offered through the Local Churches. The Circuit has adopted a strategy to give worship a more missional focus.

The plan has been structured so that each Church in a missional cluster has no more than four people responsible for the preaching in that Church. This includes the Presbyterian in pastoral charge and a number of Local Preachers who feel called to minister in this more focused way and puts the 'local' back into Local Preacher!



Training is being offered not only to the preachers, but also to everyone involved in an act of worship – stewards, musicians, technicians, readers, leaders of prayers etc., in recognition that every aspect of worship needs to be of high quality if it is to be effective.

This structure will operate in three areas of the Circuit for a two-year period and be kept under constant review.

Mark 5

Uses an effective structure and administration

- Is prepared continuously to evolve and adapt to optimise its missional response to God's missional call
- Ensures that Circuit structures and administration are driven by agreed mission priorities
- Enables the Circuit Meeting to provide spiritual leadership and an opportunity for reflection and conferring on mission priorities and wider issues
- Relates effectively to Methodist and other structures larger than the Circuit
- Works inter-connectedly with Local Churches and other Circuits, recognising the mutual dependence of different parts of the Body of Christ, and valuing the distinctive contribution of each local context
- Continually reviews the property requirement to support the agreed mission priorities
- Uses the financial resources available to support the mission priorities
- Utilises an appropriate staffing blend, whether lay or ordained, and whether voluntary or in receipt of a salary or stipend
- Provides effective, visionary leadership in a collaborative style
- Sees Circuit Stewards as part of a collaborative team providing spiritual and material leadership

Mark 7

Is effective in dealing with matters of governance and legislation

A local story

The Newcastle upon Tyne (Central and East) Circuit recognised the increasing impact government legislation was making on the work-load of the ministers in the Circuit – especially that of the Superintendent Minister. At the same time, it was recognised that some of the Local Churches' officers needed support in matters relating to finance and property. A number of innovative projects within the Circuit also required a professional approach to fundraising.

A part-time paid staff now supports the work of the Circuit and its Local Churches, providing expertise in such matters as property schedules and grant applications.

Important – but time-consuming – tasks relating to Safeguarding (such as checking visiting preachers' Safeguarding credentials) are efficiently dealt with. The Circuit pastoral staff are now released from an administrative burden in order to exercise their ministry.



Mark 7

Is effective in dealing with matters of governance and legislation

- Has in place clear aims that are specific and relevant to the Circuit's context and which are reviewed annually by the Circuit leadership team
- Has in place policies, that are annually reviewed, to cover matters that are required by law or by the governance bodies of the Church, including the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and compliance with health and safety or property legislation
- Has appropriate policies, that are annually reviewed, for dealing with matters of governance and the management of finance and property
- Has a named person responsible for the implementation and support of each policy
- Produces, and makes available, an Annual Report that is stimulating and informative, as well as complying with the requirements of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for charities
- Has a designated pastor for every community, working in the connexional network of the Circuit

Mark 5

Uses an effective structure and administration

A local story

Bradford South Circuit started with a vision – 'To be with God in the City'.

Reflecting the fluid nature of city life, the mission priority 'Sharing God's Love' requires the constant reviewing of the use of resources – people, buildings and finance.

The Circuit has a current focus for mission outside of its Local Churches. In 2011, this was BibleFresh, which opened up new opportunities for creative study and fellowship, contact with schools, community groups and workplaces.

A structure with collaborative leadership and team work supports a rich blend of skills and ministries, presbyteral, diaconal, lay, paid, voluntary, working across boundaries (e.g. in seeking external resources, sharing a Presbyter with another Circuit).



Mark 6

Develops, trains and supports

- Nurtures an environment of mutual learning and development
- Identifies the gifts, and values the developmental needs, of each individual
- Identifies and develops potential leaders
- Provides, on a systemic and frequent basis, opportunities and funding for training and staff development for all members of staff, in ways that are appropriate to their context
- Looks beyond the Circuit, when appropriate, for provision of training, development and support

Mark 6

Develops, trains and supports

A local story

In 2008 The Middlesbrough & Eston Circuit, through its Circuit Mission Policy, clearly identified the need for a co-ordinated approach to all aspects of training (formal and informal) within the circuit. The Circuit Meeting recognised that a training team led by a Circuit Steward would be required, working alongside a Communications team to identify and co-ordinate the training required.

The Policy requires that all training must be focused and support mission:

*To Love Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Christ's love,
To Make Christ known.*

This vision commits the Circuit to: 'Lifelong learning as a fundamental element of their common vocation as disciples of Jesus'.

The Mission Policy document which captured the outcomes of the Circuit review identifies strategic areas where training and development is key:

- Coordinate training programmes in order that everyone may be supported as they grow in their service of God
- Encourage and train churches to develop their work with children and young people – to reach out to them where they are, and nurture them in their faith and discipleship

