

The Strategy: Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit: Nourished and Fed, Ready to Share

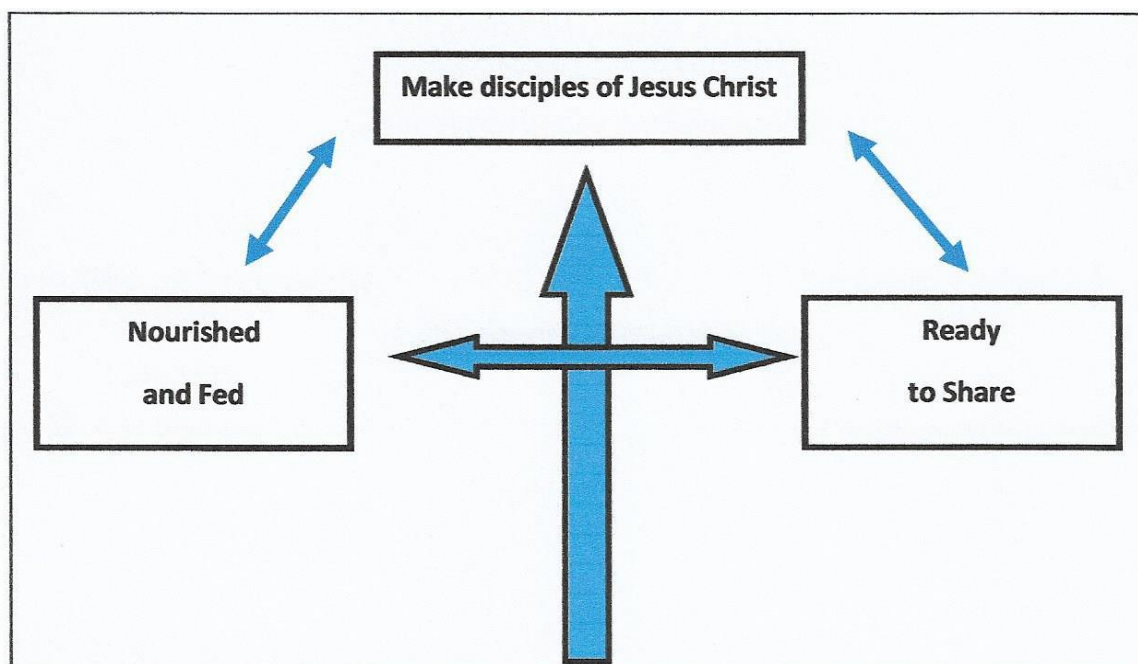
Strategic Core

The proposed Circuit Strategy (represented schematically in Fig. 1) has, at its heart, our ‘core business’ as Christians – to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are reminded of this in the “Our Calling” statement adopted by the Methodist Church in 2000: “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”. Whilst many of us rejoice in our flexible buildings, our ecumenical links, our gifting in hospitality, our good financial position and our care for one another, our priority must be to channel all of these to fulfil the commission Jesus gave his first disciples and gives us now - Go and make disciples. Critically we are not making disciples to ‘keep the church show on the road’; we are making disciples because that’s what Jesus calls us to do for the transformation of individual lives and the wider world. More people in our churches may help to address some of the weaknesses/threats identified in the SWOT analysis but this cannot be the prime motivation. It is about people before buildings, mission before maintenance and God before church just as the original vision for the Basingstoke and Reading Circuit stated.

Strategic Elements

We recognise that every disciple of Jesus – including those in all our congregations – needs to focus on their own journey as well as sharing with others. We all need to be nourished and fed or we quickly become drained of energy rather than passionate about the Gospel. The outworking of our strategy seeks to prioritise ways in which our congregations and our lay and ordained staff can continue to grow and deepen in their own discipleship and fan that passion into flame again. Whilst this in itself is good, the fruit of this nourishing and feeding is in the desire and the action of being ready to share – and then sharing – with others, the good news of Jesus Christ. The outworking of our strategy addresses ways in which support can be offered to all churches (regardless of size) to help them to think about where God is leading them in mission and evangelism – specifically how then can be ready to share – and then do so! As new disciples are made so they too share with others – nourishing and feeding them – and encouraging them to be ready to share.

Fig 1. Circuit Strategy Schematic



Strategic Foundations

The Strategy builds on the following foundational principles:

- We belong to God. God created us, God sustains us. We, and all the resources at our disposal, belong to God. In our Covenant service we say ‘I am no longer my own but yours’.
- We are part of a Connexional church. This means that we have access to a wide variety of resources (people, grant funding etc) beyond our church and Circuit. Being part of a Connexional church reminds us of our calling to support one another, to build each other up and to think and look wider than our local church, circuit, district or connexion. We are called to be kingdom-minded in the use of our resources not solely focused on the church where we are a member.
- We are part of the wider body of Christ. When we consider how we might make disciples at a local level, we must consider who else we might work with within the body of Christ, both other Methodists and ecumenically.
- We are part of local communities. Knowing who they are, working within them and building relationships with them are critical to help guide us in determining need and where to channel our resources to meet real need rather than perceived need. When we consider how we can best engage in mission, we must consider who is God calling us to work with (local agencies, community groups, councillors) in our local community.
- We need to be radical. We do not need to ‘throw out the baby with the bath water’ but we do need to be honest about what is not working. We need to give each other permission to stop doing things, in order to begin to do others.
- We need to take Godly risks, and give each other permission within and between congregations to try things – even if they ‘fail’.
- We are disciples of Jesus – called to make more disciples – and discipleship is costly. If we are to fulfil God’s mission and commission, then this will mean sacrifices for each of us.

Outworking of the Strategy

So how do we best use our Circuit money, property and people (ordained and lay) to enable worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism that allows all to be nourished and fed and ready to share and makes more disciples of Jesus Christ? The Strategic Implementation Group (SIG) proposes the following:

- 1) **Provide prayer and scripture resources for all our congregations and enable greater engagement in and with worship**
The Prayer SIG will continue to produce prayer resources and Dwelling in the Word scripture passages to help us focus on the four elements of Our Calling as the people called Methodists, (worship, learning, service and evangelism) be grounded in prayer and soaked in scripture. Provision will be made for Local Arrangement resources to be made available to churches online (and via hard copy on request); provision of LA resources distributed to all churches for a service once a quarter will continue.
- 2) **Provide resources to help individuals and groups grow in their discipleship**
Alongside providing resources for our corporate worship (see 1) above), part of our strategy for being Nourished and Fed recognises the need to provide resources for individuals and small groups. We will signpost people to resources they can use and tailor-make resources as appropriate. We will actively encourage the formation and continuity of small groups (prayer triplets, cell groups, Bible study groups) to encourage one another as we seek to deepen our discipleship.
- 3) **Help Churches produce and then action Mission Action Plans** We will provide resource (staffing, guidance notes, vision days etc) to enable each church to develop Mission Action plans which include the two elements – Nourished and Fed and Ready to Share. We want to enable all churches to answer the question “How will we make more disciples of Jesus Christ and grow in our own discipleship?”

4) **Provide Resources and ideas to support Mission Plan Actions.**

We want to encourage churches to ‘dream’ and to not be limited in that dreaming by the potential limitations of resources, including people, funding or buildings. We want to see more congregations working together to enable projects to happen. Finding other community partners also increases funding possibilities. Practical support and suggestions as well as some limited funding will be available to churches. Money is available from District and Connexion as well as ‘external’ grants but applications do require support and we can draw on this, signposting churches to those who can provide support in the Circuit and beyond it. The Connexional Property Strategy stipulates that buildings should not be closed even if congregations have ceased to meet, unless every avenue has been explored regarding the use of the building for mission. We will not be about closing buildings but about opening up possibilities for our buildings to be used in a variety of ways to meet community need to the glory of God.

5) **Move towards a model of staffing which nourishes our staff and enables their gifts and skills to be most widely utilised.**

We are fortunate to have a staff team with a wide variety of gifts and skills. We want to enable them to share these with as wide a group of people as possible through a model in which staff identify the key areas in which they would be prepared to offer wider support in the Circuit (e.g. mission, vision, worship, youth and children, prayer) Churches would still have a minister in pastoral oversight but stewards could approach other members of staff for support in different areas. In future stationing Circuit profiles we could determine what skills and gifts we need to support the Circuit and specify these.

6) **Expand and plant** – explore within the Circuit where there is currently no Methodist/Christian presence and release members to ‘plant’ as a team for mission and/or as a worshipping congregation.

7) **Share the Good News** through a quarterly Circuit publication which focuses on what different churches are doing in Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism (one element each quarter) and provides an annual record of activity.