

Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit Staffing Review

***NB Model 1 accepted at Circuit Meeting July 2021**

Introduction

In February 2020, the Circuit Meeting adopted the new Circuit Strategy. In adopting this, the Circuit Meeting agreed to ‘move towards a model of staffing which nourishes our staff and enables their gifts and skills to be most widely utilised’. The Covid-19 pandemic has presented many challenges for us as individuals, as churches, and as a Circuit and the full impact of those is yet to be fully determined. However, there have also been opportunities – for developing Mission Action Plans, for evaluating what we are doing and why, for determining what to re-start, what to lay down, and what to pick up – and for reviewing our staffing structure – all to ensure that, in line with our Vision Statement, we are placing people before buildings, mission before maintenance, and God before church.

Why a review and why now?

The reasons for reviewing our staffing are both proactive and responsive. We want to ensure that all our staff are nourished and fed, we want to encourage working as a ‘team’ across the Circuit, recognising one another’s gifts and skills and utilising these. We want to take proactive steps to avoid staff being overstretched. We want to be proactive about identifying skills that would be of benefit to the staff team and the wider Circuit and including these in future stationing profiles.

Reviewing at this time is also about being responsive. As a Circuit we are heavily reliant on supernumerary ministers covering pastoral charge and whilst, we greatly value the gifts and skills they bring, and their willingness to serve, such reliance does not offer long-term sustainability. We have been blessed in the past with the finances that have enabled us to enter stationing with a view to keeping the number of full-time stipendiary ordained staff at a relatively constant level. Our financial projections currently indicate that this is not a model that is sustainable beyond 2023 without additional funding. We have time, but we need to be responsive to this ‘current reality’ and proactive about how we might source or raise funds and who we might collaborate with to secure funding. What is not sustainable is that we try to do what we are currently doing/more than we are currently doing, with a reduced number of staff.

The Background to Model 1 (our proposed Staffing Model)

Foundations and Guiding Principles

There is no ‘perfect’ staffing model, but, if we are to follow through on the Circuit Strategy, any model of staffing should ensure that all - staff and congregations - are nourished and fed and ready to share. We also need to recognise the distinctiveness of the ministries within the Circuit, presbyteral, diaconal, and lay. Our proposed model is built on the following guiding principles:

1. We recognise that Deacons and Presbyters are Circuit ministers, and they will be assigned according to gifting in order to meet Circuit and local church missional needs while working as a team.
2. We hold that, at baptism, all God’s people are called into ministry but recognise the particular callings of Deacons and Presbyters.

3. We acknowledge the gift of lay leadership within the Methodist Church, and the special gift of lay staff in advancing the work of God within the church.
4. We seek to promote healthy models of Christian discipleship and relationship within and beyond our local church communities and the need for all to be nourished and fed.
5. We will utilise staff time to lead and serve where local churches and circuit discern the mission of God rather than only as finances allow (and will create appropriate processes to enable this discernment and decision making).

Assumptions

In setting out the model we have made the following assumptions:

**We will reduce our reliance on supernumerary ministers filling the gaps in pastoral charge. We will continue to work with our supernumeraries so that their gifts can be shared in ways that nourish and feed them and support the needs of the Circuit.*

**We anticipate retaining the same number of congregations in the Circuit at least in the short-medium term.*

We are grateful for all the prayerful discernment that is evident in the Mission Action Plans that have been submitted to date. The Methodist Conference has encouraged every Circuit to begin/continue discussions around reducing the number of Church Councils. This does not necessarily mean churches ceasing to meet but operating as 'one church' on two or more sites. Such a discussion is already well advanced in Caversham and other areas in the Circuit are in preliminary discussions. The aim of such discussions is to release more energy for mission. It is not about 'closing churches' and the Circuit cannot do this, except under exceptional circumstances where the Circuit can 'step in' if Managing Trustees are not able to fulfil their legal responsibilities.

**We will retain the same number of ordained staff in the Circuit at least for the foreseeable future.*

We are conscious of the financial situation detailed above. We are equally conscious that the current level of ordained staffing enables us to operate predominantly by keeping things ticking over rather than actively engaging with and responding to what God is doing in the world. Adopting a more missional orientated mode would require significant reprioritising of existing staff time or increasing staff levels. A reduction in staffing would mean that some churches would have minimal or no input from ordained staff.

Responding to need across the Circuit.

Lay leaders from the Circuit met in May 2021 and shared their thinking about the resources they need to realise God's dreams for their congregations and communities. These could be grouped into five categories as follows:

- 1) Youth and Children
- 2) IT/Website support
- 3) Fundraising (including bidding for grants)
- 4) Eco Church
- 5) Community engagement

They also shared about what they considered to be the best use of the time of their ordained minister and this thinking is represented in the word cloud below:



MODEL 1: A Mission, Team and Gifting Model

Our proposed staffing model prioritises three elements – mission, team, and gifting. The detail below is restricted to our ordained staffing because recruitment of lay staff is already gifting-driven and mission focused. In this model, mission is delivered under five Mission Groups (see Table 1 below). Staff are allocated to these areas based on their gifts and skills. Their brief is to work together with lay leaders to move the work in each of these areas forward. It is also to identify new lay leaders in each area and provide/signpost to opportunities for training in specific areas. Staff from each mission area will share regularly at Staff Meeting and reports from each area will be received at the Circuit Leadership Team (known locally as Strategic Executive Group (SEG)) and at the Circuit Meeting.

Table 1 Mission Groups and Staff Allocations

Mission Groups	
Vision and Strategy	Ruth Midcalf, David Shaw (and current SIG with others)
Youth and Children	Helen Watson, Martin Beukes, Yvonne Hunt, Lola Brown and group to be formed – to include children and young people
Eco Circuit	David Shaw, Ruth Midcalf and Eco-Circuit group
Worship, Preaching, Discipleship and Prayer	Audrey Browne, Maria Howard, Local Arrangements Group, Circuit Prayer Resource Group and others
Resourcing and Community Engagement	Martin Beukes, Peter Frank, Ruth Midcalf (grant bids)

It is envisaged that ordained staff members will spend an average of 6 hours per week across Mission Groups they are involved in. In reality, these hours will fluctuate dependent on particular activities, events or deadlines.

Churches requiring support should initially make an approach to the named contact for the appropriate Mission Group. These contacts will be agreed by each Mission Group team and widely publicised in the Circuit. It is anticipated that Mission Groups will prioritise and respond directly to churches where short-term support/one off events or signposting to resources are requested.

Requests for more regular medium-long term support – e.g. staff to run an activity on a regular basis – or project work requiring capital grant funding should be referred to the Missional Priority Panel (initially Ruth, Martin, Peter) who will accompany churches to share how their project/activity/initiative will contribute to a ‘growing, evangelistic, inclusive, justice-seeking Church so that new people become disciples of Jesus Christ, faith deepens for everyone, and diverse communities and churches experience transformation’ (Aims of the God for All; Evangelism and Growth Strategy of the Methodist Church). They will also look at the proposed funding structure for the project and help to signpost to further sources of funding.

The Missional Priority Panel will refer projects to SEG which they and the church seeking support, feel, after the above discernment process, should be supported. We seek support from Circuit Meeting to delegate responsibility to SEG for

- a) Allocation of staff support to work of Mission Groups,
- b) Allocation of Circuit Development funding of up to a total of £10,000 per year (individual project allocation not to exceed £3000 without Circuit Meeting approval)

Stationing going forward

We propose entering stationing in September 2021 for a presbyter for Kempshott, Oakridge, Old Basing (and Link Minister at Christ Church Chineham)¹ for a September 2022 start. This reduces our dependence on supernumeraries, provides an additional member of

¹ The September 2021 Circuit Meeting agreed that the Link Minister element of the appointment be deferred until 2023.

staff in Basingstoke and reduces the risk attached to potentially entering stationing in 2022 for two roles to start in 2023

2022/3

We propose entering stationing for an appointment at Caversham, Christ Church Woodley, and Woodley Airfield for a September 2023 start.

If one of our current presbyters seeks a move, then **we will either enter stationing or recruit a lay member of staff** for Basingstoke (Trinity, St Andrews, Oakley)

The Model becomes more unclear beyond 2023.

This Model and accompanying financial proposals give us time to recover from the Covid pandemic, re-engage in wide-reaching mission within our Circuit, and reduces staff capacity risks by giving us extra ministerial capacity to equip people and serve God for all to see. It is our hope that if we step out in faith, and refocus all our local churches, and our Circuit funds on mission, that we will bring glory to God and grow the Kingdom.