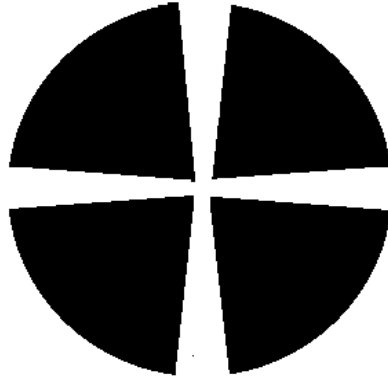


**The Methodist Church**  
**BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT (5)**  
[www.birminghammethodist.org.uk](http://www.birminghammethodist.org.uk)  
Registered Charity No. 1134167



## **SPRING SYNOD HANDBOOK**

*Representative Session*

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 10.00am**  
**The Church at Carrs Lane, Carrs Lane,**  
**Birmingham, B4 7SX**

*Chair of the District*

**Rev Novette Headley**

36 Amesbury Road, Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8LE, 0121 257 1219  
[office@birminghammethodist.org.uk](mailto:office@birminghammethodist.org.uk)

*Deputy Chairs of the District*

**Rev Phillip Warrey**

1 Prince Rupert Road, Ledbury, HR8 2FA,  
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**Rev Stephen Willey**

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*Secretary of the Synod*

**Mrs Helen Woodall**

152 Church Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2LU,  
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## DISTRICT SPRING SYNOD 2024 – CHAIR’S LETTER

Dear friends

I return from three restorative months on sabbatical and have greatly appreciated this wonderful gift of the Methodist Church to presbyters and deacons. A precious time for study, reflection, renewal and rest, that included joining a choir and walking the last portion of the Camino to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (The Way of St. James).



It is especially poignant to be returning to work in our Easter Resurrection season, recalling how the amazing message of life out of death and despair reached the apostles through the women disciples. Jesus is not dead – He is Alive! We thought that all was lost. Two days ago all hope was gone; the vision of a new world of peace, goodness and kindness had been extinguished – this is what we thought. But a new reality has arisen – Christ is Alive and God’s message of love and life is now available for the whole world.

A major part of my sabbatical has been spent observing the devastation of the Israel-Gaza war – and along with millions of people across the globe, I have been heart-broken, dismayed and appalled at the level of destruction and loss of life that has been exacted upon the people of Gaza. It has been a time of learning more of the history that has brought the world to the point where 1139 Israeli and foreign nationals were killed on 7<sup>th</sup> October. Over 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, the majority of whom are women and children. Over 200 aid workers, more than 300 doctors and nurses, more than 120 journalists. We are yet to know how many of the hostages taken by Hamas have been killed as almost 2 million Gazans are being deliberately starved to death. Almost 500 Palestinians have been killed on the West Bank since 7<sup>th</sup> October and thousands have been taken into custody, many without charge. The silence of our state media, propelled many people to research the situation for themselves, and discovered Jewish historians, legal professionals, academics, theologians and others who were able to provide information and context previously not widely known.

Suddenly, we find ourselves reviewing the past century of wars and conflicts. Where was the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when previous war crimes were taking place. We all want to believe that we would have spoken up; we would never have allowed such atrocities to take place – if we were there. Spring forward in time and we are here, with more technology and information available to us than any other generation to see with our own eyes in real time what is happening, and what does our faith in Jesus Christ call us to be and to do?

I am glad to say that Methodists across the country have been marching alongside our Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and non-faith brothers and sisters, week after week, calling for a ceasefire, the liberation of the people of Palestine, and the release of the Israeli hostages. Methodists across the connexion have been writing to their MPs to vote for a ceasefire and for the cessation of arms sales to the Israeli government. Methodists in the UK and America have been meeting on-line for prayer each week, co-hosted by our Methodist Liaison Officer for Jerusalem, Rev David Hardman. One of the highlights for me was a local Palestine gathering where families, mums, dads and children gathered to share poetry, sing songs and learn some traditional Palestinian circle dance – in the open air of Mosely Village, accompanied by car horns of drivers also wanting a ceasefire.

There will be some who hold opposing views; some may ask, Why are you so fired-up over this conflict above all the other conflicts going on around the world right now - Sudan, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine? These are all horrific and must be resolved. Perhaps it’s the length of time – 107 years

that the Palestinian people have been suffering; perhaps its because this is the region where Jesus walked; perhaps it's simply our common humanity. Certainly, there's a longing for both the Palestinian and Jewish people to be genuinely enabled to live in peace and harmony, in the land we call Holy.

Some of the questions that have been raised for me through this conflict is, "What is the purpose of my faith in Jesus Christ – is it a 'fairy-tale' or is it real and concrete? Who is the God that we are in relationship with? What kind of people do we want to be in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ?" Today in our Synod, we will be in discussions in our workshops on being the church in small faith communities; what it means to be an intergenerational, and justice-seeking church, and the implications of striving for eco-justice in our church policies and practice.

Each of us, with the support of our church community, have work to do in making our profession of Jesus Christ real, and something that brings hope and healing to our world. The Spirit of God will motivate and compel each of us to action on a variety of issues – action on poverty; youth engagement; evangelism and church growth; worship, prayer and a Methodist Way of Life. We must discern, through prayer, how the Spirit is generating compassion, care, kindness and a longing for justice within us and for the world, and then respond to God's Spirit in faithful trust and obedience.

In all things, we seek God's help, strength and wisdom to do this work with integrity and courage.

Revd. Novette S. Headley – Chair – Birmingham District

## Representative Synod Spring 2024

Hosted by the Tamworth & Lichfield Circuit,  
Venue: The Church at Carrs' Lane, Birmingham, B4 7SX

*tea and coffee available from 9.20 am*

### A G E N D A

- 10 am            Welcome
- Letters of greeting
- Worship – vision Isaiah
- 10.25 am        Introduce workshops and lunchtime table talk

#### Workshops

- *What does intergeneration church mean and how do we practise it?*
- *Starting an NPNP*
- *Taking forward eco church – the Streetly experience*
- *Walking with Micah –how to take action arising from / in response to the report*
- *Base Christian communities a model for our churches*

- 12 noon         Memorials - Modified Constitution for New Churches  
                      - Refugees

- 12.30 pm        Lunchtime – themes on tables as workshops and also Amplify and Zimbabwe

#### 1.45 pm         **District Business**

- District Vote – report on circuit votes and vote on merger resolution
- District Council
- Reports – en bloc including Methodist Council and Zimbabwe visit
- Vacancies - see Handbook

Soap Box:       David Haslam – Tax Justice; David Hallam – Zimbabwe;  
                      Richard Wilde – Rural Ministry

Farewells & Thank yous

- 2.45 pm         Worship: Love feast around tables

- 3.30 pm         Close

## **REPORTS**

### **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DISTRICT PROPERTY COMMITTEE FOR PRESENTATION AT THE SPRING SYNOD AT CARRS LANE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 20TH. 2024**

The Committee has continued its work of scrutinising and monitoring projects for the extension, improvement and renovation of Methodist Properties in the District as well as the sale, lease and purchase of properties.

Projects have ranged from those for simple improvements costing under £10,000.00 to major schemes costing over £50,000.00. Churches have continued to improve facilities for the disabled and to install energy-saving measures.

The on-line property consents system has been revised and up-dated to provide more information and is now more user-friendly with coloured symbols indicating where action is needed. The system has greatly speeded-up the process of giving district consent and has enabled access to funding to be simplified. Please will Managing Trustees note that the date of the most recent Quinquennial Inspection now has to be entered under the property details and the annual property return has to be completed before district consent can be given, also that it is best to consult TMCP before proceeding with schemes involving sales, purchases or leases of property to avoid delay, particularly if the property is listed or in a conservation area.

The new TMCP streamlined process for the sales of properties has been introduced which is reducing the time taken to progress these schemes.

At time of writing this report, only 64 out of 109 churches and 3 out of 10 circuits have completed their annual property returns which is a matter of considerable concern. A few more returns are in progress but many have not even been started!! I am grateful to all the church and circuit Property Secretaries for completing these returns and would urge the outstanding returns to be completed as soon as possible to avoid any delay in processing project consents.

However, many of the returns have flagged up issues including safeguarding policies not up-dated, safeguarding policies not displayed, property inspection forms not completed and insurance premiums not up to date. These are all matters for concern and should be addressed as soon as possible.

The register of Quinquennial Inspections of churches and manses is being accurately maintained and currently shows that thirty churches have inspections overdue from 2023 or earlier and twelve manses have inspections overdue from 2023 or earlier which are a matter for concern. Managing Trustees are reminded that consent for new property schemes is usually withheld if inspections are not up to date.

Issues of Property Matters and up-dated information from the Connexion is regularly e-mailed to Circuit Property Secretaries, Administrators and Circuit Treasurers. Please keep me informed of any personnel changes so that I can ensure that the right officers are receiving the information.

Please contact me for guidance or information on any of these matters.

Chris Osborn – District Property Secretary and Consents Enabler

0121-351-4628

07740-963106

[chrisosborn@btinternet.com](mailto:chrisosborn@btinternet.com)

## *District Archivist Report*

### *April 2024*

Our Archives are an important resource in helping us to Tell Our Story, effectively, to present and future generations, so we need to continue to archive our story today so future generations can continue to tell the story of Methodism.

Telling our Story is an important part of our heritage, to remember where we have come from, affirm and proclaim our presence today and look forward with confidence. If you haven't visited the Methodist Heritage website, [www.methodistheritage.org.uk](http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk) it is well worth a look, it also provides links to several other interesting sites, including My Methodist History, [www.mymethodisthistory.org.uk](http://www.mymethodisthistory.org.uk) which is divided into a growing number of different branches of Methodism, providing a forum for people to talk about and research their Methodist ancestors. One of the most frequent enquiries, I have through the website is from genealogists researching their family tree, who discover they have Methodist ancestors and want to know what, if any records we have about the life and times of their ancestor. Our History and Heritage offers us wonderful mission opportunities to connect with people in our communities who are researching their ancestors and want to know and understand what Methodism was about, what Methodists did, and why they did it. It also highlights to current researchers and future generations, what difference their Faith made to the lives and their Family members.

The role of Methodist archivists is primarily to ensure that Methodist Church records held by Districts, Circuits and individual churches are administered effectively, and suitably archived. Promote and Preserve documents to record history of Church and Circuit. To encourage all churches in the Circuit to be vigilant in identifying all records that are available for depositing and encourage regular checks of cupboards and safes for items no longer in use. Continually remind people of the importance of archiving documents for future reference and accurate recording for future posterity.

Archives play such an amazing role in the missional, social and heritage imperatives of the church. They reveal who we were as people called Methodists, who we are now and who we aspire to be. Our history is important and shapes us, informs our present vision and helps provide pointers for how we move forward with confidence to inspire our future vision and aspirations. Archives are an important part of who we are, and Archivists are central in helping to preserve and promote our Methodist heritage ensuring we care for our archives and our current records.

As District and Circuit Archivists, we continue to work with our local Record offices and archives departments to seek to ensure Methodist records are as accessible as possible.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any help or advice.

Diane Webb – District Archivist

0121 749 2986 [DistrictArchivist@birminghammethodistdistrict.org.uk](mailto:DistrictArchivist@birminghammethodistdistrict.org.uk)

## EcoDistrict Report to Synod - March 2024

It is now more than three years since the Birmingham EcoDistrict Programme was launched and the problems arising from the COVID epidemic and it's time to revisit our obligatory commitment as a District to 'care for the earth'. Global emissions from fossil fuels continue to raise the amount of carbon in our atmosphere, forests – the life-blood of our planet – continue to be cleared and burned, and plastic pollution is so serious that microplastic beads are now found throughout our food and even in human tissues.

First the good news: based on direct responses from the churches our District has now achieved a total of **27 awards**, 16 Bronze, 10 Silver and as usual Stratford Methodist Church setting the pace with Gold. Regular communication still leaves a lot to be desired, and close consultation with A Rocha indicates several churches who have awards, or who have signed up, have not notified me! I have had occasional responses from just over 20 other churches who have signed up and are/were pursuing EcoChurch status when last in touch. Thanks to Adam, we now have a good page on the District website though I'm not sure if many folk access this on a regular basis.

Three synods ago I spoke about the role of EcoChurch and I was encouraged by what appeared to be a strong positive response from Synod members. I hardly need to remind you again that the Methodist Way of Life prompts us to care for creation and all God's gifts and to challenge injustice. The twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change continue apace and can often seem overwhelming. The Methodist Conference has set a target of becoming a net zero emissions Church by 2030 and ensuring that all travel, electricity and gas directly funded by the Church, will have net zero emissions.

In 2009 the Methodist Church produced a challenging report - *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change*. What have we actually achieved in terms of positive action in the last fifteen years? Well some circuits have made impressive progress – Birmingham and South Warwickshire in particular. Yet in the Birmingham District around 80 churches (three quarters of our district churches) have yet to respond – even to a simple questionnaire.

Our response to the loss of biodiversity is equally disappointing. The State of Nature Report (2023) records UK wildlife's devastating decline. We live in one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and one in six of the 10,000 species assessed faces extinction. We really have to do better than this . . .

We've just heard that February 2024 was the warmest and wettest month ever with average global temperatures reaching over 1.7 degrees. We continue to see a global economic system built largely on greed and overconsumption – which is fundamentally at odds with God's original intention for the world. We're reaping what we've sown and those who have caused the least damage are experiencing the most devastating effects.

Our District Eco task-forces comprises just me and two others; it's time each of our Circuits appointed an official EcoRep and all our Circuit Meetings include an 'eco' slot on their agendas God forbid we are weighed on the scales, and found wanting.

Mark Boulton



District EcoCoordinator



## Youth Engagement Report

Work with children, young people and leaders across the District is continuing to thrive.

In March this year we held Amplify 2024 at the Pioneer Centre in Cleobury Mortimer. This weekend away for 8s-18s and their leaders focussed around being a justice seeking church with “what do you care about?” being the weekend theme. We were pleased to welcome over 100 young people and 40 leaders and stewards to be involved in all aspects of the weekend from worship to archery, from craft to campfires. Friendships were made across the groups and there was a real buzz around ‘next time’!

Looking back to October 2023, many of our groups from across the District attended 3Generate - the national children and youth assembly, and many more adults volunteered at the event. Highlights included worshipping as part of a thousand strong group of young Christians, hearing about the church in the Caribbean and Americas, indoor adventure activities and learning about the Methodist Way of Life.

3Generate is coming back to the NEC next October (4th-6th). Applications for volunteering are already open and 3Generate are really keen to hear from you, even if you can just spare part of the weekend. Tickets will be going on sale for young people in April at £120 each for the weekend. Please support and encourage the young people in your church to be a part of this fantastic weekend.

After their time visiting 3Generate, 3 members of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas (MCCA) were hosted by the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit with support from others. They met with young adults from the Birmingham District and experienced our locality - including a trip to Cadbury world. Following on from this, by way of exchange, 2 young adults in the Birmingham District have been offered the exciting opportunity to go out to visit the MCCA. They will be a part of the Encuentro youth assembly taking place in the Bahamas in July. I'm sure they will be at the September Synod to tell you all about it!

All of these exciting opportunities for our children and young people couldn't happen without the support of local volunteers and workers. Leaders are offered the opportunity to gather together every half term to share experiences and information and to access training and introductions to further areas of development. An upcoming highlight will be our All We Can Retreat Day on the 18th May.

One of the biggest areas of feedback and conversation points brought by the leaders this year has been around numbers. There seems to be a sense of growth within the numbers of young people engaging in many groups across the region, but a decline in or lack of new volunteers coming forward is putting the leaders already involved under a lot of pressure.

To support leaders and potential new volunteers, we are running the YouthScape Essentials course over 3 Saturdays this summer. This course aims to build confidence in engaging with young people both as a youth leader, or as someone in the church who wants to be able to have those conversations with the young people in their church community. Each session will cover insights into what it is like to be a young person today, skills needed to engage and support young people, and areas of Christian character that we want to develop in ourselves as leaders and to pass on to the young people that we work with. The course will run at Wellington Methodist Church over 11th May, 8th June and 13th July. More information and booking can be found here: <https://bit.ly/yse-wm24>

Please do continue to pray for and support your young people and their leaders in your local contexts.

Charlotte Scrivens  
[youth@birminghammethodist.org.uk](mailto:youth@birminghammethodist.org.uk)

YouthScape Essentials training will be at Wellington Methodist Church on 11th May, 8th June and 13th July. sign up here: <https://bit.ly/yse-wm24>

Leaders meetings and gatherings will be:

In person All We Can Retreat Day (venue tbc) 18th May and online on 8th July. Contact Charlotte for the details.

3Generate - 4th-6th October.

# STREET BANQUET

(the popular name of the Street Ecclesial Community)  
Birmingham Methodist District's Church at the Margins Project

## REPORT TO DISTRICT SYNOD

- Vision

To build a new Christian community upon the model of God's New World as expressed in Jesus' Parable of the Great Feast, whereby those people marginalised by society are honoured guests.

- Background

While the vision has inspired work with the Street Community in Birmingham city centre for almost 20 years, it was only in September 2022 that both Connexional and District resources were released together through the Church at the Margins programme so that the work could develop and strive for its potential.

- Street Banquet

The most visible and widely known aspect of our mission and ministry is the monthly meal offered to members of the local Street Community. People are welcomed as honoured guests to a freshly prepared, nourishing, sit-down meal, which is served to them by a growing community of hosts. These faith-rooted dining events have seen an increase in the number of guests over the 12 months, reaching around 130 people at some banquets, with families, including their young children, in attendance on certain occasions.

- Emerging Christian Community

One very encouraging development, and the cause of great joy, has been the number of guests who have offered themselves to be members of the growing community of hosts. Now over a third of our Street Banquet hosts are former guests, which is a wonderful foundation upon which to build and nurture a new Christian community. Towards strengthening relationships and furthering discipleship, we have begun to hold Hosts Celebrations at St Philip's Cathedral, when an informal Love Feast of food, prayer and testimony is shared.

- Training & Oversight

All of our hosts undertake initial training covering issues relating to homelessness and safeguarding vulnerable adults, including the current housing crisis, local services, addiction, trauma, and abuse, as well as practical topics such as First Aid awareness and food hygiene. After the training session, each host has a one-to-one meeting with a member of our oversight Prime Group, who talks them through the formal Host Agreement. As the community of hosts grows, it increasingly shares decision-making responsibilities with the Prime Group, particularly on matters of practicality and logistics.

- Street Chaplaincy

Ministry to the local Street Community and Birmingham's homelessness sector is offered by visiting drop-in centres, food projects, and hostels, and through an on-street presence. At the moment this is fulfilled by the Pioneer Minister, but we will be looking for an opportunity in the future to gather a chaplaincy team.

- Wider Connections

Street Banquet is an active participant in the Birmingham Christian Homelessness Forum, which brings together faith-based groups and organisations from across the city. Through the work of the Forum, the Pioneer Minister has been instrumental in forming a working group to explore the prospects for a new residential community in Birmingham. Over the last 18 months, the Pioneer Minister has also played a role in establishing a Connexional Church at the Margins practitioners' network.

- Challenges

The increase in the number of guests, coupled with rising food costs, has meant that the financial outlay of providing a Street Banquet has risen to over £200 per month. With the increase in demand comes the need for adequate space to hold our welcome meals, and the closure of The Church at Carrs Lane, which has been our regular venue, raises a particular challenge for the future. St Martin in the Bull Ring, St Catherine of Siena and the Warehouse Café have been trialled as venues and other premises and locations are sought. We are exploring ways to remodel of our mission in response to the changing circumstances.

- Further information

To find out more about Street Banquet and how you can support our work in Birmingham city centre, please look at our website: [www.streetbanquet.org.uk](http://www.streetbanquet.org.uk)

Neil Johnson (March 2024)

**District Mission Advisor***Synod Report Spring 2024*

It continues to be a great privilege to work alongside you all as the District Mission Advisor. In my 21 hours I continue to focus on encouraging New Places for New People around the District.

Our three District Led projects continue to grow and we are beginning to think about what different phases might look like and how we can best support and hold projects as they mature. There are other reports if you are interested in these projects themselves. The two live, God for All funded, Circuit led projects (Peckwood Forest Space in the Bromsgrove and Redditch Circuit and the Stechford Project in Birmingham) have made a fantastic start. Both of these projects, supported by ordained pioneers offering part of their ministry, have unique opportunities and challenges which we are working through. I am also working with a number of other circuits and contexts where vision is being discerned and I do hope we will have another couple emerging in due course. There are, of course, a number of other earlier stage, lower cost, or circuit funded projects which are very exciting. This results in a rich diversity of new Christian communities across the district many of which are engaging marginalised communities. In addition to my support in coaching leaders, we gather most of the pioneers alongside a number from the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District for the Pioneer Community of Practice. This has grown in recent months and is now established as a fantastic support and sharing space where the richness of the diversity of the projects is on full display.

In this next season I will be working with Danielle Wilson, who is now to be offering five hours a week to support Inclusive Gatherings around the wider district, to more clearly define phases of emerging new congregations which will help as we seek as districts and circuits to support these new communities.

Beyond the NPNP work I have offered some time to the District Merger Task Group, some limited visioning and discernment work to local churches, Mission Action Planning with some circuits. In reviewing the District Development Plan we have identified some ways to take this work forward by gatherings some best practice / tools and ideas to share and train some facilitators who can offer this more widely. I also offer induction meetings for new ministers and continue to support lay workers as and when I can, support the Community Organising Pilot, the national NPNP Guiding Team, facilitate the Mission Strategy Group, assist with the planning and facilitation of synod and occasionally help with some of the general district IT!

If any of my areas of focus have sparked something for you please do get in touch for a conversation.

Many blessings,

Adam Sanders (March 2024)

## **Inclusive Gathering Birmingham – Synod Report – April 2024**

**Inclusive Gathering Birmingham** is an NPNP LGBTQ+ majority ‘pioneer’ church project that began in 2017. This has been a year full of challenges, blessings and growth at Inclusive Gathering Birmingham. This time last year, our report celebrated our move into Birmingham’s Gay Village and the growth and partnership that had resulted in the Southside District and LGBTQ+ community as a result.

We began at the Church at Carrs Lane, and had several venues over the last few years, but have seen our most significant growth since September 2022 when we moved into the Southside District/ Gay Village in response to opportunity (and we believe, God’s leading). The majority of our church population has joined the community during this period of time.

For almost a year, (Sept 22 – August 23) we met above [The Loft](#) which had a large accessible meeting space that they allowed us to use for almost nothing. Being in a queer space that is a ‘home from home’ for so many who have been marginalised led to significant growth, increasing youth and diversity. Many were drawn to attending church in a queer space (rather than in a church space) flipping expectations on their head and modelling a theology of liberation. We grew week on week and built relationships with the staff and community as church gatherings led to social/ relationship building times over food and drinks afterwards downstairs.

Unfortunately, due to a downturn in business, the Loft closed the space we were meeting in with short notice last summer, and (after much searching) we were forced to move into expensive meeting space in a hotel in order to stay in the Gay Village (and not lose the missional headroom we had made).

Despite being the right location, the hotel room hire is not sustainable, and being in a clean cut corporate environment is not the right fit for us missionally long term. Regardless, we continue to meet as a worshipping community on Sunday afternoons and we continue to grow. Most young attendees don’t attend any church every week (as is the trend), so we typically see 60-70 on our fullest weeks, but have 150+ in our orbit of attendees. This is increasing. There are new people at every gathering without fail.

We have a very close relationship with the Southside (City Centre) BID (Business Improvement District) team who proudly call us ‘their church’ and have collaborated with them on several projects including carols with [The Choir with No Name in Hippodrome Square](#) (our main Christmas outreach that was actually fully funded for us by the Birmingham Pride Foundation).

Another highlight has been working with our Southside neighbours the Old Rep Theatre to host [our successful Dolly Church](#) outreach event in January. We had nearly 200 people attend and involved a secular community choir, local drag artist, IGB musicians, a local band and the wonderful Trey Hall pontificating on the spirituality of Dolly. Excitingly, we’ll be bringing a version of Dolly Church to Greenbelt this summer!

We’ve been blessed to be joined by an increasing number of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees within our church community – this last year as seen many go from occasional attenders to being vitally part of the life, teams and ministries of the church. We’re also increasingly motivated to organise and advocate for immigration reform and practical support as a result.

Another exciting development has been the growth of our worship band team who have not only grown in numbers and the capacity to lead music at more of our events, but have really fed into the spiritual vitality of our community.

We are diverse in every sense of the word – our community is LGBTQ+ majority and ethnically and gender-diverse and includes families, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and people from a range of faith traditions. The population of the church is quite young in relation to wider Methodism, with the majority of attendees aged

between 20 and 50. In addition to this, we are also seeing an increase in straight/ cis folks who are no longer content to be in faith spaces that don't celebrate the gifts and spirituality of queer people and others often marginalised by the church.

### **Challenges**

It has been challenging to operate with uncertainty around our venue over the last 7 months, and it has taken leadership time and energy to negotiate space and pursue future options alongside keeping the community gathering and in the loop of what is going on. We've weathered this as well as we can and still seen growth.

We are in the midst of change in our leadership structure to accommodate our growth and the development of our community. Several key leaders who have been part of the life of the church have stepped back or stepped away. Though we have excellent and emerging new leaders in our community, we do feel the change and it hasn't been easy. In response to a few safeguarding incidents and our subsequent learning with the District, we've made a few small positive changes to our policy and practice. This process has been hard, but we're grateful for the support and guidance of the District Safeguarding Team, the Mission Advisor and the District Chairs.

In this next season, as a maturing NPNP, we are putting focussed time and energy into our leadership structure, governance and our relationship with the District. We've already invested significant time in our current model, and we're excited about what it looks like to further embed IGB in the life of the District. This is a key project for Danielle Wilson and Adam Sanders over the next year.

### **Future Developments**

As we've said, we feel that the Southside District/ Gay Village is 'our patch' and are committed to being in this part of the city and contributing to its flourishing, but we have struggled to find a venue that gives us long term stability.

In October, the Southside BID manager introduced us to a local Queer business owner expanding into a larger venue who was very interested in partnering with us. With the amazing support and experience of the District (particularly Adam & Phil) we've been on a journey toward this which would allow us to have dedicated space for IGB to grow and flourish for the next 10 years working in partnership with a well known and respected queer venue in the Gay Village.

This project is still in process, but would allow us to explore long term dreams like the development of inclusive interfaith chaplaincy in the Gay Village (as an outworking of the church's mission), local partnership for inclusive youth and childrens work, mid-week support clinics for marginalised groups, faith exploration small groups, worship band rehearsal space, multiple Sunday services (as needed), learning space for new IG communities in the District and more.

We hope to have more to report on this soon! Thanks for your support of this work and you are very welcome to come and visit us at 3pm any Sunday. You'll find cake and a warm welcome.

Danielle Wilson (she/her)

Pastor, [Inclusive Gathering Birmingham](#)

## **Methodist Women in Britain Birmingham District Report**

Rev Sue Smith took over as President from Deacon Marilyn Slowe at a service at Lichfield Methodist Church on Saturday 1 July 2023, it was an uplifting service with wonderful hospitality from the members of Lichfield church. At the service an update was given on the project supported during Deacon Marilyn's time as President which was REMISH – Retired Methodist Ministers Homes in Sierra Leone. Rev Sue Smith introduced us to the project MWiB would support during her office which is Deep Griha, a Charity that helps feed older people in India.

Our Autumn meeting was on 21 October 2023 at Erdington Methodist Church. Fund raising ideas were explored during the morning session. In the afternoon session we were privileged to hear the personal experiences of two refugees.

Our Spring meeting is 27 April 2024 at Erdington Methodist church from 10.30 to 3.30 with Bring and Share lunch. In the morning, we will be having speakers from MHA Live at Home Scheme and in the afternoon Speakers from our current Fund Raising project Deep Griha.

Plans are underway for our Autumn meeting on 9 November 2024, also at Erdington. It is hoped our Spring meeting in 2025 will be at Bromsgrove.

The Officers meeting to plan our meetings takes place on Zoom and the secretary would be very pleased to hear from anyone who would like to join us.

*Annette Ashford Methodist Women in Britain Birmingham District Secretary.*

[annetteash21@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:annetteash21@yahoo.co.uk)

As part of this report I include the report from Diana Bosman below. Though the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District MWiB is officially closing so the combined MWiB Area of Birmingham, Mid Wales and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury will be trying to work together with Ambassadors to hopefully cover the whole area so watch this space and do ask for women particularly around Coventry, Birmingham Circuit and Herefordshire to consider becoming an Ambassador. Initially we are trying to find one person in each church who may be willing to receive MWiB information so if you know just one person in your church, please let the Birmingham MWiB Secretary know. All in progress but hoping much progress will be made in the next six months. Always an optimist. Diana [MWiB Trustee]

## **District Safeguarding Report for Spring Synod 2024**

### **Appointment of new Assistant District Safeguarding Officer (ADSO)**

In October 2023, Kay Redfern, ADSO, retired and we started the recruitment process immediately. On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 we appointed Steph Bradley to the role. Steph has extensive safeguarding experience, having completed 33 years working for West Midlands Police. Steph specialized in child protection, vulnerable adult abuse, domestic abuse and managing risk and was instrumental in Op Satchel which was the biggest child abuse investigation completed by West Midlands Police, resulting in 21 people convicted and imprisoned.

Steph's primary focus will be leading on delivery of the Advanced Course and overseeing the audit process as well as case work when necessary.

### **Training**

ADSO Steph Bradley has started to deliver the revised Advanced Safeguarding Training from the beginning of March '24. Steph assisted in the delivery of the Advanced Training course for the Inclusive Church Birmingham and met with Rev Neil Johnson at Street Banquet to offer bespoke training to this project.

Reminder: candidates need to have completed a Foundation Course or Foundation Refresher Course in Safeguarding before booking onto an Advanced Course. Circuits are responsible for delivering the Foundation Courses.

Safeguarding training should be completed every 4 years. Once you have completed the Advanced Course there is no need to repeat the Foundation Course.

Below are details of the Advanced courses planned in thus far:

9/3 Kidderminster

16/3 Ledbury

23/3 Cannock

13/4 Wolverhampton

20/4 Dale Street Leamington Spa

11/5 Sutton

21/5 Droitwich

25/5 Coventry

1/6 Solihull

8/6 Wednesbury Black Country

22/6 Telford

5/10 – Vale of Stour

Please contact Steph to book a place on an advanced course. Steph can be contacted on [stephaniebradley@birminghammethodist.org.uk](mailto:stephaniebradley@birminghammethodist.org.uk)



## **Audits**

Contact has been made with every Circuit in both Districts to ensure that church level safeguarding audit processes are carrying on to monitor how well safeguarding is carried out. Steph has offered to meet with those churches that may be struggling with this. Some of the District Safeguarding Group have started to dip-sample some of the completed church audits for quality assurance.

The Connexional Safeguarding Committee is currently carrying out national Safeguarding Audits of Districts. Birmingham and W & S are still to be audited.

## **God Welcomes All: How faith informs safeguarding (study guide) ~ Theology of Safeguarding**

Sue Holder has circulated the study guide to all Circuit Safeguarding Officers and ministers. This will assist members understand why the Church safeguards. This is a very useful study guide with a facilitators guide. The study guide includes videos and activities for participants to do.

## **My Concern**

The new IT recording system for District Safeguarding Officer and Connexional Safeguarding Officers has now gone live and there is an expectation that all previous cases will be transferred over. Obviously, this is taking some time to do given the competing demands of the new cases coming in. There are some teething issues in how low-level concerns are recorded as calls/emails taken for advice lack the personal details to create a record.

## **Safeguarding Contracts**

The Methodist Church welcomes all but only if it is safe to do so. We have a safeguarding process in which those who may pose a risk to others are welcomed but they need to have a safeguarding contract in place which may set certain conditions to allow them to worship safely.

There are currently 4 live cases in Birmingham. All are actively being reviewed in line with their review dates. This includes 1 new one for W & S.

## **Caseloads**

Both DSO and ADSO continue to work 20 hours per week. However, recently their workloads have been far over this and hopefully, they will redress the imbalance in future months and claw their time owed back.

With the increase in awareness of safeguarding, the caseloads are increasing which is very positive.

## **Sue Holder**

## **DSO**

## Learning Network Spring Synod Report

### Greetings Synod!

Thank you for continuing to make space for the Learning Network (LN) to share our updates with you.

In this season of Eastertide, as we reflect on rebirth; on mourning, hope, and new beginnings; we share with you our gratitude for the ongoing invitations we receive from your churches, circuits and district to mourn, hope, and recreate with you. It is our great privilege to journey with you in mission, ministry and discipleship; to be welcomed and trusted by you; to help you make your contexts safer, more efficient and more effective, so you can respond to the Great Commission that we are called to.

The LN continues to shift and change in response to the needs across the Connexion, wider society and creation; we are working mindfully towards our [Net Zero target](#), evolving our [inclusive](#) and [justice-seeking](#) practice, and deepening collaboration. Our online provisions are increasing, with most meetings, training and events now accessible online, yet our team remains flexibly available to you; offline and in person where and when appropriate. We hope you might now be encountering more of the LN team since we have moved to a 'one team' way of working!

Thank you for your engagement with our [Facebook group](#) and the newer [Methodist Resources Facebook Group](#) – we greatly appreciate these Connexional-facing opportunities for conversation, questions and sharing, and thank you again for moving with us, so swiftly, to this centralised model of communicating.

Please be encouraged to stay in contact or get in touch with us – we are a relatively small team yet with big dreams to develop our relationships with you, to deepen our learning from and with you, and to thereby serve you as best we can. If you would like to know more about our LN team and our work, please visit our new [webpage area](#).

Here are some of the forthcoming LN opportunities available to the Connexion:

- [Positive Working Together](#), Online opportunities in April, June and July for training centering on transforming conflict and managing change and transition.
- [Explore](#): Beginning again this spring, Explore is a nine session course for any member of the Methodist Church in Britain to take a breath, step back, and consider how they are called to respond to God's call through worship, learning & caring, evangelism or service.
- [Circuit Stewards' Communities of Practice sessions](#) continue on the last Wednesday of every month, where Circuit Stewards from across the Connexion are invited to gather online to learn together with members of the Connexional Team, share good practice, ask questions and build relationships.

For more, and to keep up-to-date with how the LN can support and resource you, [please sign-up to our newsletter](#), join our [Facebook group](#), and or contact your aligned officer.

In the Birmingham District, your aligned officer is Deacon Kerry Scarlett, who continues to work in close collaboration with Adam Sanders (District Mission Enabler) and with our equivalent colleague in the Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District. As well as offering support to churches and circuits, much of Kerry's time over the past eighteen months has been spent developing the two year regional Faith Rooted Community Organising Pilot. Along with colleague Eddy Aigbe, whose role is to support local church leaders to embed the practices, the pilot has been a valuable space for learning about the joys and challenges of connecting with others, building teams, and acting for change in church and community. If you are interested in finding out more, do check out the blog, '[Called To Organise](#)'. Please do get in touch with Kerry for a conversation about any learning and development needs your circuit or church might have; either by email ([scarlettk@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:scarlettk@methodistchurch.org.uk)) or phone (07799 900472).

***With many blessings, Your Learning Network Team***

**Birmingham District and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District.**

## A day in the life of a District Rural Officer

On Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January, Matt Jeffrey (Arthur Rank Centre CEO) and I were privileged to spend the day with Rev Richard Wilde, Rural Officer for Birmingham Methodist District.

First stop - Stratford Livestock market, where the consistent presence and prayerful listening of a rural chaplain is welcomed and appreciated both by those who gather and those who work there. We were able to speak with the senior auctioneer Alastair Brown (who is also Chair of the National Livestock Auctioneers Association) about the multiple challenges faced by local farmers, as well as the national & international pressures upon those working in the agricultural sector. This week's sale consisted of mostly sheep... and two goats!  
[photo L-R; Matt Jeffrey ARC, Alastair Brown, Rev Richard Wilde]



Next stop - lunch break at [Henley-in-Arden chapel](#), where we met two members keen to show us around. Andrew Steele and his father, Local Preacher James Steele (pictured below in the community library). Their family have been members since the chapel was built in 1894. Henley in Arden is now a class of Stratford upon Avon Methodist Church.

The chapel entrance hosts the community fridge – open for both donations and for taking what you need. The main worship space is flexible and rented out to various groups during the week. The former school room behind the worship space now hosts a community library. The chapel has already attained an A Rocha Eco church silver award. As Richard says; “It was inspiring to hear just what is possible in a rural location with some creativity and partnership working. This has enabled there to be a continuing & meaningful Methodist presence in a small community when membership has dropped below twelve.”



Our final stop for the day – we attended the launch of the [Hidden Hardship exhibition](#) at Coventry Cathedral.



Dr Stephanie Denning's research findings around coping strategies and barriers to wellbeing in rural Britain is presented in an accessible format alongside some beautiful artwork by Beth Waters. The recommendations are all things we can/should be raising awareness about, as well as bringing to the attention of our local and national government leaders.

An online visual booklet of the exhibition can be found here: [Hidden Hardship Short Storybook - Hidden Hardship \(coventry.ac.uk\)](#)

For details of rural mission support offered across Britain, please see [Rural Hope \(methodist.org.uk\)](#)

or contact Sarah Hulme, Methodist rural mission & ministry officer. [hulmes@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:hulmes@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## **BIRMINGHAM METHODIST DISTRICT - SPRING SYNOD 2024**

### **SYNOD REPORT – “ZIMBABWE LINK VISIT – Kadoma District”**

**10-20 October 2023**

Seven Birmingham District Methodist members excitedly travelled out to Zimbabwe on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023. We were a group of presbyters and lay people, six of whom were preachers – Revds. Novette Headley, Farai Mapamula, Cleopas Sibanda; Deacon Jane Mills and Maurice Mills; David and Claire Hallam. On the middle Sunday of our visit, we each preached in different Circuits around the Kadoma District, and were generously hosted by church members.



You might expect that the first impression to hit us as we arrived in the Zimbabwean spring would be the warm weather – yes the weather was comfortably warm, and the subtle light purple jacaranda trees were in full blossom, against the blue sky. But what struck me first of all as we emerged from the airport was the light! There is a brightness and clarity of the African air that just causes you to breathe so much more deeply, and exhale ‘arrival’! We were met, at the airport by the Kadoma Methodist District team, and the following day visited the Zimbabwean Methodist Connexional Office and the Trinity Methodist Church in Harare where we met and prayed with Presiding Bishop George Mawire.



Bishop Peace Simango and the Kadoma District team had arranged a packed schedule for our eight-day visit. Kadoma District is just one of the eight Districts of the Zimbabwe Connexion of this vast country – so there was a lot of territory to cover. We were able to meet theological students training for the Methodist ministry at the United Theological College, located on Methodist land called Epworth. The enthusiasm for education was evident throughout our visit. A fair amount of our time included visiting Methodist Schools such as the Chegutu Primary School, the Marshall Hartley School which was dedicating some newly built dormitory accommodation for students, and Moleli High School that specializes in the sciences as well as vocational disciplines to cater for children of all abilities. The Mathew Rusike Children’s Home is another institution for which the church is proud, because of its development over the decades, and the success of the children who have grown up under its care.



One of the highlights for the Birmingham District Group was to attend the Kadoma District Music Convention – an all-day Saturday event where enthusiastic all-age choirs and musicians with traditional horns and drums competed for a place in the Connexional Music Convention that would take place in November 2023. The musical standards of the choirs were very high, and the judges took time at the end of the day when the

awards were distributed to give feedback to the choirs on how they could improve in future years. Another highlight was the mid-week prayer meeting at Chinhoyi Methodist Church that we attended and at which David was asked to bring a sermon on the spur of the moment. Of course, David was in his element and delivered a stirring message that evening. Our rest day, towards the end of the trip included a visit to the mystical Chinhoyi Caves in the north of Zimbabwe. Those of the group brave enough, descended the dark stone steps towards the bright, crystal blue lake at the bottom of the caves. We were also taken on the half-day Kariba Safari where we saw zebra, elephants, kudu, buffalo, crocodiles, hippopotamus, and monkeys. The view over the Kariba lake, looking over into Zambia, was breath-taking.



Most of the conversations with our hosts took place as we drove across the country or as we stayed with our hosts. We really appreciated having one main host, and not moving every night to different hosts. We discussed the priorities of the church in Zimbabwe, the determination to build more churches; to develop the growing youth leadership and address the common malaise and anxieties that afflict young people around the world; the need to improve the accommodation for presbyters who share the deprivations of their members; and the brain-drain that benefits the West, but which depletes Zimbabwe. The wealth of natural resources is something which is characteristic of the African continent – the motherland of humanity – and which we recognized in the fruitfulness and minerals of the land, the stonework, the rivers and lakes. We were struck by the overall hopefulness of the Methodist members. One of our group commented on the abiding memory of the large numbers of people of all ages worshipping together with dance, song and joy: “I found the wholehearted and vibrant praise deeply encouraging.”



As always, the hospitality and generosity of our hosts was overwhelming. They not only fed us but spent time with us, and sent us home with a fresh awareness that our common limitations of resources – be that people or finances – will not be an impediment to us living out the gospel of love and care proclaimed by Jesus Christ. We are keen that Circuits across the District consider making links with Circuits in the Kadoma District by possibly sharing on-line *Meet and Greet* sessions, joint prayer meetings or Bible study sessions – there is only one hour time-difference between us! Please make contact with the District Office if this is something that your church or circuit might be interested in.

Revd Novette Headley  
Spring Synod - April 2024



## Methodist Church Spring Synod Report

Thank you for the wonderful support from our friends within the Methodist Church, your tremendous dedication to Methodist Homes (MHA) and your overwhelming support of our mission, vision and values has again supported our vital work in helping people to live later life well.

### Changes at MHA

2023 was another challenging year with the cost-of-living crisis, inflation, massive increases in energy costs and a shortage of workers across the care sector.

The biggest changes were announced in May 2023 following a strategic review of MHA's services. The decision was made to sell ten care homes, place Auchlochan Garden Village in Scotland and its two associated care homes, into administration and sell the charity's three remaining retirement living schemes in Scotland. Since the announcement, Hafan y Waun in Aberystwyth has transferred to the local authority. The sale of eight homes is proceeding well and should be completed by spring. Sadly, the buyer for the tenth home, Cedar Lawn in Stratford upon Avon, withdrew and in January, MHA had to make the difficult decision to close the home.

### Revd Crispian Acher

In August 2023, we were shocked by the unexpected and very sudden death of our Head of Chaplaincy South, Crispian Acher, who at that time had just taken on the role of Acting Director of Chaplaincy and Spirituality. Crispian was a much loved and respected member of staff throughout MHA and beyond and is greatly missed.

### Celebrating MHA's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary

The 80<sup>th</sup>-anniversary service held at Wesley Church, Harrogate on 23 September was a joyful occasion, and it was wonderful to be joined by so many friends from the Methodist Church. President of Conference Revd Gill Newton preached an inspiring sermon, encouraging us to look back with thanksgiving, and to continue forwards in confidence, knowing that God is good, loving and faithful.

### Finding Nana

The children's book, "Finding Nana" was championed by Crispian Acher up until his untimely death in August, and now becomes his legacy. It was developed in recognition that it can be daunting for children when a loved one moves into a care home and seeks to address the anxieties that such young people may have when preparing to visit a friend or relative for the first time. The story has been written by author Jenni Bacon following visits to an MHA home and is illustrated by Sophie Parmenter. It has been published in partnership with Methodist Publishing and BRF. It is now available to order and will be formally launched in February 2024.

## MHA Sunday

In 2023, MHA Sunday was themed around our intergenerational work, reflecting on 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, and how we need one another for our wellbeing. Through your generous support, we have raised approximately £160k through MHA Sunday activities and other support from faith communities.

This year, our MHA Sunday will be themed around Mark 4:30-32, the parable of the mustard seed, as we reflect on how the seemingly small act of making a regular telephone call has a big impact in our telephone befriending service. In this year's video, we meet Dot and Grace, who were matched through this service, and witness them meeting face to face for the first time. MHA Sunday is held on 9 June 2024, but you are welcome to hold your service on any date that fits with your calendar of activities.

Our dedicated web page has free downloadable resources including an order of service (available in English and Welsh), the video, sermon notes and a fully worked sermon; everything you need to plan your service. You can also order Gift Aid envelopes for your church or circuit. To find all of this, visit [mha.org.uk/Sunday](https://mha.org.uk/Sunday).

**Thank you for all your support. In faith and kindness, we are stronger together.**

## **Memorials**

### **Modified Constitution for New Churches**

The Birmingham District Synod has begun to implement the recommendations of the Oversight and Trusteeship Reports and the God for All Strategy. In doing so, across the District, we have a number of different expressions of church oversight emerging and a number of New Places for New People beginning. In these places we are seeing growth in mission and discipleship.

Those involved with leading 'traditional' churches exploring different oversight arrangements, for example multisite churches, and those pioneering New Places for New People, are finding that the constitutional requirements for Local Churches in Part 6 of Standing Orders, in particular the Constitution of the Church Council in SO 610, unhelpful for a variety of reasons. In particular the offices required in SO 610(1) not reflecting the expression of church that is emerging and the desire for smaller governance bodies to release people for mission and discipleship.

The Synod is aware that under Section 48A of Standing Orders, there is provision for Districts with Modified Constitutions, and similarly under Section 58 provision for Circuits with Modified Constitutions.

The Synod therefore asks the Conference to direct the appropriate committee to consider a policy for Local Churches with Modified Constitutions following the precedent already set for Districts and Circuits, and for that committee to work with the Law and Polity Committee to draft the relevant Standing Orders. The Synod believes such provision would enable more flexible and effective oversight and managing trusteeship for Local Churches, particularly New Places for New People, as the Oversight and Trusteeship report envisaged. In terms of New Places for New People, provision would need to be made for a Local Church's first constitution to be a modified one. For existing churches, provision would need to be made for modification of their existing constitution under Standing Order 610.

The Synod hopes the provisions in the Standing Orders would allow for maximum flexibility, with model constitutions being available on the Methodist Church website for both 'traditional' churches and New Places for New People. The Synod recognises modified constitutions would need to be approved and noting the comments in MC/24/15, suggests these could be approved by the District Policy Committee on the advice of the District Chair and Synod Secretary.

Proposed *Adam Sanders*  
District Mission Advisor  
Seconded *Rev Neil Johnson*  
Pioneer, Street Banquet

### **Refugees**

The Methodist Church warmly welcomes the Report of the independent Commission for Integration of Refugees, launched in March this year, encourages Methodists actively to engage with it, and urges Government to study and act on its far-sighted recommendations.

Proposed *Rev David Haslam*



**Joint Districts Resolution**

**Report on votes taken in Circuit Meetings on merger proposals**  
**Prepared for Synods of the Birmingham Synod and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Districts**  
**meeting 20th April 2024**

**Background**

In September 2023 a joint meeting of the Synods received proposals to create a new merged District from September 2025. Each Synod, meeting separately, returned a vote of 70% in favour of requesting the Methodist Council to take this proposal forward. The Methodist Council, meeting in October, directed that a vote be taken in each circuit meeting.

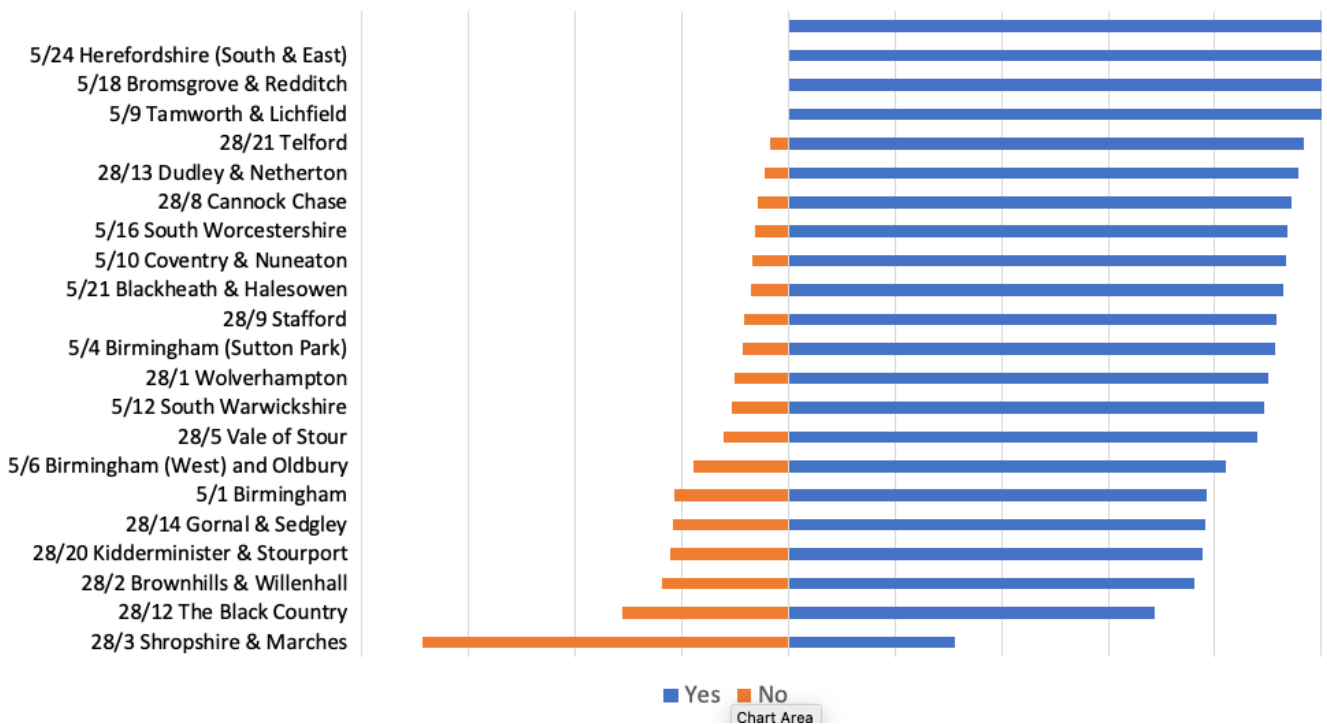
During Spring 2024, members of the Joint District Task Group visited every circuit meeting to give a standard ten-minute presentation. Time was given to questions, after which a ballot vote was taken in which people were asked to vote for or against the proposal for merger.

Members of the task group would like to put on record their thanks to circuits for the reception they were given and for allocating time generously in what were often busy agendas.

**The Results**

- All twenty-two circuit meetings voted. All but one voted in favour.
- In total, 634 people registered a vote (266 in Birmingham; 368 in Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury)

**Votes (Percent) in Favour of District Merger at Circuit Meetings**



- The average Circuit vote across the two Districts was 87% in favour (92% Bir; 82% W&S)

## Reflection on the voting patterns

- The circuit meeting votes involved a greater number and wider cross-section of people than the votes taken at the Synods. They show a significantly greater level of support for the merger proposal (87% compared to 70% by the Synods).
- Circuits may be characterised by a range of features .... some are rural and others urban; some are relatively large and some much smaller; some are near to the boundary line between the two Districts and others on the fringes of the combined area. However there are no discernible patterns linking these features to the voting patterns shown above.
- Of particular note is result from the Shropshire & Marches Circuit, which voted two to one against the proposal. This circuit covers an extensive geography, covering roughly 90 miles from north to south and being made up of around 57 churches. The circuit meeting was held online and was attended by Rachel Parkinson, Chair of Wolves & Shrewsbury and Helen Woodall, Birmingham Synod Secretary. In around 40 minutes of questions, the overall impression was that this circuit already feels “on the edge of things” in relation to District resourcing and was concerned that a merger would exacerbate this. There was considerable doubt expressed that “bigger” structures might deliver “better” results.

## Questions raised in Circuit Meetings

Circuits varied considerably in how many questions they raised. Questions often focused on the following areas:

- how a larger body might affect the quality of relationships within the District
- financial implications for Circuits in the short and medium term
- the impacts that belonging to a larger District might have on day to day Circuit life
- how a new leadership structure might work in practice
- accessibility to District life (eg Synods) when on a larger scale
- location of District Office / Synods / District meetings

## Reflection and Learning by the Joint Districts’ Task Group

The process of meeting with the circuits has helped the task group to refine and shape what we hope a new District might embody. In particular we note:

- The image in the video presentation of the District as a trellis upon which the vine of circuit / church life can grow proved to be a powerful one. It reconfirmed to the task group that the District is, above all, a resourcing network. We note that a trellis structure is not a centrist model....it spreads across the area where plants are growing, offering equal support in every location.
- Whilst it will be important to “get the structure right”, a primary focus should continue to be placed on a new District as a place of good communications and relating. Leaders in a new District should prioritise the building of good relationships across the whole region.
- The strong negative reaction from the Shropshire & Marches group is a welcome reminder that this was not a rubber-stamping exercise. Circuits were free to vote against. Attention will continue to be paid to addressing the concerns of this and other circuits.
- The current Districts have within them many “marginal” or “fringe” people and places. These include:
  - churches on the geographical fringes

- children and young people, especially those present in churches in very small numbers.
- fledgling communities trying to be church in new ways
- churches both urban and rural serving places of severe economic disadvantage
- people and communities vulnerable to unjust treatment on account of their ethnicity, sexuality or differing ability.

The task group is reflecting on what a District might look like that puts these margins at the centre.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Will I need to travel further to meetings?

*It depends where you live, but on average we don't anticipate longer distances. As the boundary between the two Districts cuts diagonally through the new District there will not be a massive increase, if any. Travel will not be further than Hereford to Nuneaton or Leominster to Stone. In addition to this, many meetings will take place online. We are mindful of our eco commitments and are looking to locate an office / meeting space in a central location which is more easily accessible by public transport than is the case for our current offices. In this sense we hope that travel will actually be more enjoyable and better for the environment than is currently the case.*

### 2. What benefits does a merger give that can't be achieved by simple cooperation, as happens at present with safeguarding?

*The newly formed district will be better positioned to offer the support, encouragement and challenge that is required to work towards our vision. The scale of the new single district will mean more team-working, more expertise and less parallel processes. For teams and individuals already working across the boundary it will mean a simplification - for example the safeguarding team will only need to report to one DPC. Geographically, it will encourage travel by public transport and map more easily onto the west midlands combined authority with a centre of gravity in the Wolverhampton & Birmingham urban mass. Finally, the opportunity to start with a blank slate, review our priorities and take the best of what is currently happening will be a helpful process in itself.*

### 3. Will District assessments for circuits be any lower?

*The task group undertake that the district element of the circuit assessments will not increase except for inflation. The papers to the Synods include an outline budget for 2024-27 for the general expenses of the district. Mission and Ministry staff are not included in this as they are funded from the DAFs rather than the circuit assessments. It is unlikely that assessments will be much lower unless a greater percentage of district costs are met by the DAF. However, if the DAF is used in this way there would then be less money for grants for your mission projects.*

### 4. How will the finances pan out? Will one district end up subsidising the other?

*The resourcing is similar across the two districts so there will no "subsidising" in that sense. Much of the resourcing (such as how much we receive into the DAF, is calculated on a member or number of staff basis which will not change). The new District Secretary post would be funded for the first five years by the connexion as a transitional support grant. Income from the sale of one of the existing manses could be set aside to fund this post for future years.*

**5. Will the support for circuits and churches- eg in property, mission - be diluted?**

*No, rather the hope is that the best that is offered in each individual districts will be available across the new District. So, the level of support will at least be maintained at current levels and it will be more specifically targeted.*

**6. How will stationing be affected?**

*It is not anticipated that the stationing process will be affected. The District Chair will continue to run the process alongside a lay representative. With the additional support of the District Secretary the District Chair will be released from some duties and have a greater capacity to focus on stationing and take on the load from the two combined districts.*

**7. Will support for presbyters and deacons be reduced?**

*No, rather it is hoped that with a bigger district team with a diversity of skills and expertise it is hoped that the support will be at least maintained, and be more targeted.*

**8. Will there be any redundancies among lay employees?**

*The geography of the new district and its pattern of senior leadership may mean some of the current roles will need to be redesigned but this will be done in conversation and full consultation with staff and no redundancies are planned as a result of this process. Formal TUPE processes will be followed but until the outcome of the Synod and Conference votes are known these cannot be started.*

**9. Will my church receive extra pressure to close?**

*No, the district has no power to close local churches or force circuits to reorganise. In fact, the new District is explicitly focused on enabling churches to flourish. With the additional support and expertise, it is hoped that less churches may close in the long run as a result of the formation of the new District.*

**10. Will this mean my circuit finds it more difficult to get a match in stationing?**

*No. In addition to the answer given above about the stationing process, this merger is us playing our part in relieving the pressure when it comes to the shortage of presbyters. By reducing the number of separated chairs from two to one, we release a full-time presbyter to be available for stationing elsewhere.*

**11. Will my circuit be forced to merge?**

*No, the District has no power to force circuits to merge. However, we do hope that the removal of the boundary between the two existing Districts will open up new possibilities as and when circuits wish to explore mergers or reorganisations.*

**12. How will the new district support EDI / JDS?**

*EDI / JDS is currently a priority in both district and has already been identified as a key priority for the new district. In the current model, with only a district chair as the key leader, it is difficult to get representation. In the new model there will be a greater role for deputies / assistants and the new role of District Secretary. This new collaborative arrangement will make it easier to get diversity of representation in the senior leadership. The new district will continue work with the circuits and churches to champion EDI.*

### **13. Will the difference in level of ministerial staffing be equalised across the two districts?**

*It is true that Birmingham has a higher ministerial staffing level per member than Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury. However, when you adjust for part-time appointments and remove the Queen's appointments the difference is not as great as it might initially seem. Within the new District we would be working within the same constraints as the existing two Districts which cannot simply redeploy ministers or, indeed, decide how individual circuits spend their money. Circuits define and fund appointments in consultation with the District Chair and ultimately ministers have to be willing to come and fill any appointment. So, when it comes to Circuit assessments, there will be full equality across the new District in how the assessment is calculated. The levels of staffing are dependent on local decisions in Circuits and Churches, and the stationing process.*

### **14. How will the new District be better for rural churches?**

*The new West Midlands District will be committed to championing rural mission and ministry. To this end we would hope to appoint a rural officer and also ensure that any decisions around location of synods and other meetings do disproportionately take into account those travelling from a rural context.*

#### Resolution 1

In the light of the votes in the circuit meetings, the Birmingham/Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Synod confirms its support for the merger of the Birmingham District and the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District to form a combined West Midlands District from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.

#### Resolution 2

Synod re-appointed the Combined District Implementation Task Group as agreed at Synod 9 September 2023, with the addition of Mr. Ade Johnson. Synod further instructs the Task group to recruit other members to work on particular areas of development, reporting regularly to the District Policy Committees. The Task Group will consist of:-

Revd Novette Headley, Revd Rachel Parkinson, Revd Margaret Eales, Helen Woodall, Revd Richard Hall, Revd Phil Warrey, Andrew Beattie, Rob Turton, Norma Bryan, Adam Sanders, Jo Yair, Revd Ken Howcroft, Ade Johnson.

### **Re-invitation of Rev Novette Headley**

Due to connexional (national church) policy at the time of her appointment Revd Novette Headley's appointment is only for 3 years until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025. Novette is eligible to ask for an invitation to sit down at the end of August 2026.

Following a wide consultation by the Chair's Nomination Panel, the District Council recommends to the Synod that Revd Headley is invited to serve for a further year from September 2025 either as one of two joint chairs for the first year of the new district or as chair of Birmingham District depending on the joint district votes at the Synods and Conference.

Novette's ministry is valued for her ability to listen, her calm wisdom and her nurturing and encouraging leadership. The District Council believes Revd Headley would bring continuity and strong pastoral leadership at a time of change and potential upheaval.

**DISTRICT APPOINTMENTS (from September 2024)**

A \* indicates a new appointment that needs Synod approval.

**DISTRICT OFFICERS**

District Chair	Rev Novette Headley
Deputy Chair	Rev Phillip Warrey
Deputy Chair	Rev Stephen Willey
Synod Secretary	Mrs Helen Woodall
Presbyteral Synod Sec	Rev Caroline Hague
Mission Advisor	Mr Adam Sanders
Youth Engagement Coordinator	Mrs Charlotte Scrivens
District Council Secretary	Ms Sandie Smith
District Treasurer	Rev Neil Bishop*
Finance Officer	Ms Patrycja Nedza*
Local Preachers Tutor	<i>Vacancy</i>
EDI Officer	Rev Doreen Koffie-Williams
ECO Enabler	Mr Mark Boulton
District Rural Officer	Rev Richard Wilde*
Safeguarding Officer	Mrs Sue Holder
Assistant Safeguarding Officer	Mrs Stephanie Bradley*
Property Secretary	Mr Chris Osborn
Chair's PA	Mrs Deborah Webb

**DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Chair of District	Rev Novette Headley
Deputy Chair	Rev Phillip Warrey
Deputy Chair	Rev Stephen Willey
District Council Secretary	Ms Sandie Smith
District Rural Officer	Rev Richard Wilde
Synod Secretary	Mrs Helen Woodall
Presbyteral Synod Sec	Rev Caroline Hague
Treasurer	Rev Neil Bishop
Lay Stationing Rep	Mrs Gill Weller
Property Sec:	Mr Chris Osborn
EDI Officer	Rev Doreen Koffie-Williams
Mission Advisor	Mr Adam Sanders
District Youth Co-ordinator	Mrs Charlotte Scrivens
Safeguarding Officer	Mrs Sue Holder (in attendance as observer)
Representatives:	Rev Iain Ballard
	Rev Steve Levett
	Rev Jill Marsh
	Rev Cleopas Sibanda
	Deacon Marilyn Slowe
	Mrs Jennifer Tolley
	Rev Jo Thornton
	Mr Heath Watton

## PROPERTY COMMITTEE

Ministerial Sec & chair	Rev Philip Warrey
Chair of District	Rev Novette Headley
Property Secretary	Mr Chris Osborn
Treasurer	Mr Philip Osborn
Manse visits coordinators	<i>Vacant</i>
Archivist	Mrs Diane Webb

Rev Iain Ballard, Mr Brian Bradley, Mr Stephen Buck, Mr Kenneth Holmes, Synod Secretary

## SAFEGUARDING

Independent Chair	Sue Barnsley
Chair of District	Rev Novette Headley
Safeguarding Officer	Mrs Sue Holder
Assistant Safeguarding Officer	Mrs Stephanie Bradley

Mrs Jan Channer, Mr Keith Drinkwater, Mrs Laura Hodges, Mr Stuart Watkins

## RESOURCING MISSION GROUP

Chair	Rev Iain Ballard
Convenor	Mrs Helen Woodall

Rev Neil Bishop, Deacon Corinne Brown, Rev Novette Headley, Mr Andrew Morris, Mr Chris Osborn, Ms Sandie Smith, Rev Philip Warrey

## ECUMENICAL OFFICERS

Coventry and Warwick	Rev Sam McBratney
Birmingham	Rev Nick Jones
Herefordshire	Rev Philip Warrey
Worcestershire	<i>Vacant</i>
CLASP (Staffs)	Rev Joanna Thornton

## METHODIST WOMEN IN BRITAIN

President	Rev Susan Smith
Secretary	Annette Ashford

PROBATIONERS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE  
(joint with Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District)

Chair of District	Rev Novette Headley, Rev Rachel Parkinson
Secretary	Rev Ruth Wilson

Rev David Butterworth, Beverley Greaves, Mrs Ermine Mitchell, Mr Chris Shaw, Deacon Janet Thomas, Members from W&S

## SABBATICALS

Chair of District	Rev Novette Headley
Secretary	<i>Vacancy</i>

Rev Mary Austin, Rev Gary Hall, Rev David Hulme, Professor Paul Jackson, Professor Judith Smith

BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HOMES (BISH)

Trustees:

Rev Stuart Burgess, Caroline Humpherson, Rev Ian Howarth, Mr Peter Johansen, Mr Andrew Steel (Chair)

DISTRICT CHAIR'S NOMINATION PANEL

Synod Secretary & Convenor      Mrs Helen Woodall  
Deputy Chair                              Rev Stephen Willey  
Deborah Majola, Rev Farai Mapamula, Jane Morriss\*, Trevor Pethick, Rev Jo Thornton,  
Rev Ruth Wilson

DISTRICT RECONCILIATION GROUP

Mr Keith Drinkwater, Rev Clive Fowle, Rev David Haslam, Rev Sam McBratney, Rev Pauline Salter

DISTRICT COMPLAINTS SUPPORT GROUP

Rev Alison Geary, Rev Novette Headley, Rev Caroline Homan, Rev Donald Ker

\*New Appointment

***Vacancies:***

Local Preachers Tutor  
District Manse visitors  
Sabbaticals secretary  
Lay Stationing rep (to shadow current)  
Ecumenical officer Worcestershire

**Faith at Work in Worcestershire Trustee - Rev Mary Austin**  
**CIGB (Churches Industrial Group Birmingham) – Mr David Pinwell**

**Dates for District Meetings 2024 – 2025**

**(These are the dates that are currently fixed for the next Connexional year. The full diary of District meetings will be put on the District website in June.)**

**Synod**

14<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Presbyteral: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**New Ministers Welcome Meal**

28<sup>th</sup> August 2024 6.00 p.m.

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## **Notices**



### **Bible Month 2024**

#### **Are you doing Bible Month on Genesis this year?**

A special **Study Day on Genesis**, the Bible Month book for 2024, has been organised by Kidderminster & Stourport Circuit's LP&WL Meeting:

**Saturday 4 May**

**at**

**Trinity Methodist Church Centre, Churchfields, Kidderminster DY10 2JL**

**10.00 for 10.30 – 15.00**

***[Tea & Coffee provided – please bring your own packed lunch!]***

Open to the Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury and Birmingham Districts, this study day will be led by Dr Andrew Mein, Director of Research at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham.

Whilst aimed primarily at preachers, the day will be of interest to those leading the study of Genesis in small groups – and to anyone who wants to get to grips with the pivotal first book of our Bible!

The venue is a 15 minute walk from Kidderminster railway station and also has ample free parking on site. There's a map on the church web site: [trinitymethodistkidderminster.org.uk](http://trinitymethodistkidderminster.org.uk)

To reserve a place on Saturday 4 May, please contact:

**Mike Dornie**

Secretary

Local Preachers & Worship Leaders' Meeting

Kidderminster & Stourport Methodist Circuit

**Email: [mikedornie@aol.com](mailto:mikedornie@aol.com)**

**Tel. 01299 400284**

The Kidderminster & Stourport Circuit will be having themed preaching on Genesis throughout October 2024.

Adavu is a regional charity tackling modern slavery in the West Midlands and supporting survivors rebuild their lives in the long-term. Originally a project of the Birmingham Methodist District, Adavu is now an independent charity (1199391).

Adavu is holding an online auction that will run from 7<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2024 to raise vital funds for its work so please do have a go and bid from a selection of wonderful donated items such as:

- Original art work from a Methodist Minister – “Treasures in dark places”
- Restaurant vouchers
- Body shop hampers
- Luxury chocolate and wine hamper
- Family ticket to the National Space Centre
- Hand-tailored tweed coat and shopping totes
- Sumptuous back and shoulder massage

Click on this link to have a browse before its official opening on 7<sup>th</sup> May – we are sure you will find something you would love to have!

<https://app.galabid.com/adavuauction/items>

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## Could St Peter’s Saltley Trust help support your bright idea?

We’re dedicating a third of our annual grants budget to fund **grass-roots** projects being developed by individual local churches, schools or colleges (or small local partnerships of these).

Grants are available for **new** work which is creative, innovative, experimental and exploratory in nature, and focused upon either:

- Religion (particularly Christianity) in school education
- Religious literacy, church-college partnerships and spiritual development in Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges
- Christian learning and discipleship within church and community settings

We particularly want to support the development and trialling of new initiatives which could become the model or inspiration for work elsewhere.

For more detail on funding priorities and eligibility criteria, see: [www.saltleytrust.org.uk/what-we-support/](http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/what-we-support/).

You can also contact: [director@saltleytrust.org.uk](mailto:director@saltleytrust.org.uk)



## **District Manse Visitors and District Manses Visits Co-ordinator**

*Following Neil Bishop accepting the role of Treasurer we need volunteers to serve as Manse Visitors and someone to organise and administer the visits.*

Under the standing orders of the Methodist Church each manse has to be inspected every five years to ensure that it is in a fit condition as a residence for the Minister and their family. Each circuit is visited once every five years on a rolling programme.

Volunteers are needed to undertake these visits and a Co-ordinator is needed to arrange and record them.

*These are volunteer roles. Travel and other expenses will be met*

For further details and an application form please contact  
[office@birminghammethodist.org.uk](mailto:office@birminghammethodist.org.uk)