

# District Strategy

## 2022-2027

**Purpose:** The Yorkshire West Methodist District is part of the Methodist Church in Great Britain and exists to **inspire, equip** and **resource** the circuits and churches of the District to support them in living out the calling of the Methodist Church to respond to the Gospel of God's love in Christ.

Through this working in partnership we seek, with God's help, to be a **growing, evangelistic, justice seeking, inclusive and safe, church** living out its discipleship and mission.

*This purpose is derived from:*

1. SO400A which speaks about the primary purpose of the District<sup>1</sup>
2. Our Calling<sup>2</sup>
3. The God for All Evangelism and Growth Strategy<sup>3</sup>

*We understand a growing, evangelistic, justice seeking, inclusive and safe church living out its discipleship and mission to mean:*

**Growing:** *where relationships with God and others are nurtured and deepen and where more people increasingly join a shared life of following Jesus.*

**Evangelistic:** *where the Good News of Jesus is shared in words and actions, and people are invited, encouraged and equipped to commit to following Jesus in day to day life.*

**Justice seeking:** *where attitudes and structures that marginalise others are challenged, and Christians join with others in prayer and action for peace, mercy, justice, equality and the flourishing of all creation.*

**Inclusive and safe:** *where all are welcome, diversity is celebrated not condemned, participation is enabled not held back, and our welcome protects the safety and wellbeing of all.*

**Context:** The context in which the District exists is multi-stranded and within each strand there is great diversity across the District. The key strands to our context are:

- **Gospel of Jesus Christ** - this is our supreme context, that all of who we are, all of the communities we serve and all that we seek to do flows from the creative and creating God who revealed God to the world in Jesus Christ. It is both in and through the saving love of Jesus and in the power of Holy Spirit that we can respond to these multi-stranded contexts and become a growing, evangelistic, justice seeking, inclusive church living out its discipleship and mission.
- **Geographical** - within the District there are significant urban areas and large rural areas. We have areas of affluence and areas which experience high levels of economic deprivation. There is a rich diversity of ethnic backgrounds, with large black and Asian communities embedded often in the more deprived urban areas. This makes cross-cultural and interfaith work important to churches and to the District.
- **(Post) Pandemic** - we continue to live in a world responding to COVID-19. Over the last 2 years this has brought unending challenges and cost to communities and to the church. It has also provided us with many opportunities. As we move forward from the pandemic, many people are overwhelmed and exhausted, many of the challenges we knew we would face in the coming years have been brought forward by the impact of the pandemic.
- **Climate Emergency** - this affects all our communities and all our churches. For us to offer a missional lead that helps people to change their lifestyles to ones that are in concert with holy living on our planet, we will need to embed responses to the Climate Emergency in all that we

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/22811/conf-2021-cpd-vol-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/our-calling/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/19181/conf-2020-4-evangelism-and-growth.pdf>

do. This will impact on mission and ministry, on buildings, on worship, on governance and administration.

- **Digital** - we live in a digital first world which provides us with many opportunities for discipleship and mission. At the same time across the District digital poverty and exclusion is a reality. Whilst there is a great desire to engage with the digital context there is also a skills shortage in this area which needs to be addressed.
- **Declining and Ageing Church** - it would be wrong not to acknowledge that in the majority of places where we have Methodist societies their age profile is primarily 70+ and are in numerical decline. Alongside this there is a significant pressure to fulfil trustee and officer appointments and the number of ordained staff in circuits has reduced. These two realities leave increased and significant pressure on those ministers, lay employees and volunteers appointed in circuits and churches. Placing this alongside the national context of a reduced number of available ministers for stationing, we are in a context where we need to be radical about reducing the number of societies, buildings and trustee bodies to be more effective in discipleship and mission.
- **Safeguarding** - the church has not always been a safe place for all and there is a growing realisation of the abuse of many which has taken and is, sadly, still taking place in the church. In recent years the Church has done much to ensure its safeguarding practice has developed and all in the church understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. This focus and development must continue if the church is to be a safe place for all.

**Priorities:** In light of our purpose and context, the District will prioritise the following to support the churches and circuits to live out the calling of the Methodist Church.

#### **Inspiring Mission and Ministry:**

- Being a praying community of disciples holding before God the mission and ministry of the whole district.
- Regular communication which holds the need to be a 'to be a growing, evangelistic, justice seeking, inclusive church' before the whole district and shares stories of how this is happening.
- Encouragement which enables missional change in all areas of the church.
- Encouragement to take risks and to have a go without expecting instant success; also acknowledging that not all risks will 'work'.
- Developing strong relationships between churches, circuits, neighbouring districts, the wider connexion and the world church which enable joined up thinking and resourcing.
- Speaking prophetically beyond the Church in the Yorkshire West Region.

#### **Equipping Mission and Ministry:**

- Encouraging intentional discipleship and mission which includes evangelism, primarily but not exclusively, through A Methodist Way of Life.
- Co-ordinating the District's response to the Climate Emergency.
- Encouraging conversations, modelling and developing digital discipleship and mission which includes evangelism.
- Supporting Youth, Children's, Family and Intergenerational Work through discipleship, mission which includes evangelism, participation and representation.
- Equipping rural ministry through informing, inspiring, resourcing and connecting the rural churches and circuits in the District.
- Equipping Town and City Centre Ministry through a community of practice.
- Leading on particular pieces of missional ministry where there is either no local capacity or limited local resources.
- Participating in the connexional funding programme for New Places for New People and Church at the Margins.
- Encouraging Pioneering mission which includes evangelism in different ways, primarily but not exclusively through the Methodist Pioneer Pathway.

- Developing a District wide response to Justice, Dignity and Solidarity to ensure the District reflects the beauty and diversity of God's people.
- Helping circuits to be more effective in discipleship and mission which includes evangelism through engaging with the oversight and trusteeship report to reduce their societies, buildings and trustee bodies.
- Offering effective wellbeing supporting to ministers, lay employees and officers to enable them to flourish in ministry.
- Working with the Yorkshire Plus Learning Network team to offer relevant training and development to the District.
- Sustaining and developing appropriate ecumenical relationships and partnerships.
- Sustaining and developing appropriate interfaith relationships and partnerships.
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**Resourcing Mission and Ministry:**

- Supporting ministers and circuits engaged with the stationing processes.
- Providing effective Lay Employment support and advice.
- Providing effective communication across and beyond the District.
- Providing first class Safeguarding services to enable the church to be a safe place for all.
- Stewarding the District financial resources well and assisting circuits to do the same.
- Stewarding District property and offering good property advice to circuits, including an effective consent giving process.
- Offering grants to churches and circuits to further their mission and ministry.
- Modelling and encouraging good governance, in line with the oversight and trusteeship report, across the District.

**Letting go:** Recognising that in common with all levels of the church we have limited capacity, the District will be mindful of stopping some things and holding others more lightly in order to focus on its key priorities.

**Structure:** To support the delivery of the District plan the synod has adopted the attached District structure.

**Objectives:** To ensure the District priorities are delivered, each of the priorities will be assigned by the DPC to a District committee and to an individual to lead. The named individual will be responsible each summer for agreeing with the relevant committee an action plan for the priority for the following connexional year. The committee will then monitor the action plan through the year.

*This version of the District Strategy was agreed in principle at the Spring 2022 Synod and finalised by the DPC (acting under a delegation from the Synod) in May 2022. In September 2023 the DPC agreed to split the priority about ecumenical and interfaith relationships and partnerships into two separate priorities to ensure Interfaith relationships and partnerships are not lost.*