

# **THE SUPERINTENDENCY OF THE SHEFFIELD METHODIST CIRCUIT**

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

When proposals regarding a new Circuit for Sheffield were drawn up in 2011, they included the vision of a group of co-Superintendents working together as a team. The document in which those proposals were recorded states *"All Superintendents need to build a close trusting relationship and to this end no one must be seen as the lead Superintendent. Rather, they offer different skills and gifting to the Circuit. Together, the Superintendents will be charged with offering clarity of leadership and vision to the Circuit."*

The same document stated that *"through the Mission Resource Group, Superintendents would be set free to focus on providing clear leadership as a team. The team of Superintendents would continue to attend some of the same meetings, e.g. Circuit Meeting and Mission Vision Team, but as a team it would mean they do not have to be at all meetings. They would, of course, have pastoral charge and preach around the Circuit."*

Since the creation of the Sheffield Circuit in September 2013, a co-Superintendency team has existed in the way envisaged in these proposals. It has moved through a variety of formations as individuals have moved on from the Circuit or retired. Over these years the team has sometimes consisted of four members, and at other times there have been three.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

Since September 2020 the co-Superintendency team has consisted of three members – Revds Sally Coleman, James Morley, and Lisa Quarmby. At the time of writing this report, Revd Sally Coleman is on sick leave (having been so since Easter 2021) and Revd Lisa Quarmby has stepped down from the co-Superintendency team with effect from 31st August 2021. This means that from September 1st, 2021, Revd James Morley has been the only co-Superintendent working in the Circuit as there is uncertainty about when Revd Sally Coleman will be ready to return to work. When she does return it is likely to be on a 'phased return.'

This situation prompted a conversation between the Circuit Stewards, the co-Superintendents, and the District Chair regarding the way in which the Superintendency of the Circuit could effectively be fulfilled in the immediate future.

Two meetings of the parties named in the previous paragraph, have been held to explore possible ways forward and during those conversations it became apparent that this may be a "Kairos" moment which should not be ignored. Whilst the situation in which the Circuit finds itself is challenging, this may be an appropriate time for a review of the Superintendency to be undertaken. A Circuit review was conducted in 2015 by Jane Bingham of the East Midlands Learning Network region. The resulting report recommended that a review of the Superintendency be undertaken, but this recommendation was not acted upon by the Circuit at the time or since.

There was general agreement that now is the time for a review of the way the Superintendency is handled within the Circuit, but that inevitably raised questions about how the Superintendency could be held during the period of review.

## **CONDUCTING A REVIEW**

When, how and by whom a review should be conducted was discussed and there was agreement that any review should be conducted by an independent person so that the review is completely

objective. Some names were suggested but it was agreed that the District Chair should approach the Co-ordinator of the Yorkshire Plus Learning Network to seek recommendations.

Such a review should be conducted in a thorough and timely manner, in a way that is not disruptive to the functioning of the Circuit, but in a way which gives robust evidence for the shape of the Superintendency that is going to be most fruitful for the Circuit as it moves forward.

#### POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR HANDLING THE SUPERINTENDENCY DURING THE REVIEW

Consideration was given to the following possible ways forward for the period of review and with effect from 1st September 2021, bearing in mind that at this stage, the date of Revd Sally Coleman's return to work is unknown:

- Revd James Morley to continue as sole Superintendent but without any pastoral charge
- Revd James Morley to continue as sole Superintendent but with support from the District Chair and/or Circuit colleagues, and with considerable or complete reduction in his pastoral charge
- Revd James Morley to continue as sole Superintendent and be joined by Revd Sally Coleman in the Co-Superintendency when she is ready to return to work if the agreed phased return includes Superintendency responsibilities. A reduction in pastoral charge would potentially be needed for both presbyters for the period of the review
- Revd James Morley to step out of the co-Superintendency while the review takes place and the District Chair to become titular\* superintendent.

During this discussion the following factors were noted:

- It is difficult to see at this stage and with short notice, who within the Circuit could take responsibility for the churches for which Revd James Morley currently has pastoral charge if he was to take sole responsibility for the Superintendency.
- Removing Revd James Morley from the churches with whom he currently works could potentially have a negative impact on the re-invitation process into which he will enter during the coming connexional year
- The date and nature of Revd Sally Coleman's return to work is, as yet, unknown and uncertain.
- Standing Order 431 allows the District Policy Committee *"to formulate and promote policies which will advance the mission of the Church in the Circuits and Local Churches, and in particular, to supervise the use of resources of personnel, property and finance and to assist Local Churches and Circuits having exceptional problems."*
- Whichever option is pursued, Revd James Morley and Revd Sally Coleman will retain the status of co-Superintendent and the associated remuneration throughout the period of review and until such time as clarity is obtained regarding the shape of the Superintendency in the future.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CIRCUIT LEADERSHIP TEAM FROM THE CIRCUIT STEWARDS

The Circuit Stewards wished to record their thanks to the current co-Superintendency team for their willingness to initiate these conversations and highlight the need for a review of the way in which the Superintendency is held within the Circuit.

Having taken all the aforementioned factors into account, the Circuit Stewards made the following recommendations to the Circuit Leadership Team. The recommendations are not a reflection on the ministries of those who currently inhabit the role of co-Superintendent or on those who have previously inhabited that role. They were considered by the Circuit Stewards, to be the most

appropriate way of creating the space for an objective review to be conducted and for wise decisions about the way forward beyond the review to be taken. Moving forward in this way will cause least disruption to the life of local churches and to any re-invitation processes which are due to be undertaken during the coming connexional year.

These recommendations were made following full consultation with Revd James Morley and Revd Lisa Quarmby. No conversation about these recommendations had been held with Revd Sally Coleman at that time as conversations about work were not possible during a period of sick leave. This has been confirmed with the Connexional Wellbeing Team as being appropriate practice at this stage.

1. Revd Gill Newton become Titular Superintendent with effect from September 10th i.e immediately following the meeting of the District Leading Team on September 9th, and until such time as the review is complete and clarity about the future shape of the Superintendency is agreed.
2. Revd James Morley relinquish Superintendency responsibilities for the period outlined above. During this period, he will retain the status and remuneration applicable to a co-Superintendent.
3. Revd Sally Coleman relinquish Superintendency responsibilities as part of her agreed phased return to work and for the remainder of the period outlined above. During this period, she will retain the status and remuneration applicable to a co-Superintendent.
4. The District Leading Team to be invited to enact Standing Order 431 and appoint Revd Gill Newton as Titular Superintendent.

#### REQUEST OF THE CIRCUIT LEADERSHIP TEAM TO THE DISTRICT LEADING TEAM

The recommendations of the Circuit Stewards were unanimously supported by the Circuit Leadership Team at a meeting held on August 25th, 2021, at which the District Chair was also present.

The Circuit Leadership Team, recognising that the Circuit is at a 'kairos' moment and finds itself in exceptional circumstances, therefore requests the District Leading Team to enact Standing Order 431 and appoint Revd Gill Newton as Titular Superintendent. Following such action, the Sheffield Circuit Meeting will be informed of this decision at its gathering on September 14th, 2021, and the District Chair will assume her responsibilities from that point.

Since the initial conversations began in the Circuit, Revd Sally Coleman has been advised by her GP that a 'phased return' to work may be possible. With Sally's agreement and on the advice of the Connexional Wellbeing Team, an Occupational Health Assessment is in the process of being carried out in order to determine the nature of the work in which she will be able to engage during that phased return. This development has also enabled conversations regarding her return to work to be held and she has been fully advised of and is supportive of the course of action outlined above.

#### RESOLUTION

**The Sheffield Circuit Leadership Team ask the Sheffield District Leading Team to enact Standing Order 431 and appoint Revd Gill Newton as Titular<sup>1</sup> Superintendent with immediate effect. This appointment should be reviewed following completion of the independent review regarding the future shape of the Superintendency of the Sheffield Circuit and in the light of the review's recommendations.**

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<sup>1</sup> Titular – inhabiting the role but not assuming the status