

SHARING STORIES

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES DISCUSSION

9 NOVEMBER 2021

Leading Team will this year focus on one strand of our strategy in each meeting. From this we will set related targets and actions for the following 12 months. Our November meeting will focus on sharing stories.

Our five year strategic aims agreed back in January are:



Our aim	What we will do	What we expect to see
Make testimony normal <i>noticing God moving in our lives</i>	Model use of testimony in all District meetings Support & encourage recognised leaders to model and invite regular testimony Provide support and advice for circuits/churches seeking to increase use of testimony	Increased regular use of testimony amongst members and churches
Share stories <i>recognising God acting in our societies</i>	Promote stories of God at work regularly via District social media, email, printed resources. Recognising a gospel of hope, including from vulnerability and lament District officers/ leaders to model inspiring communication	Increasing levels of interaction with District social media and regular emailed communications
Make communication easy <i>celebrating God present in our communities</i>	Provide website and social media support where helpful to circuits/ churches Provide communications/ media advice for circuits & churches, that they might be better equipped to know, be known by, and speak into, their communities	Increased interaction with church & circuit social media Sufficient good quality information about all churches readily available online
Creating a culture of invitation to relationship with Christ <i>trusting God speaks into the hearts of our neighbours</i>	Support & encourage circuits/churches seeking to create a culture of invitation, getting beyond social activities to faith exploration. With permission and care, celebrate stories of new relationships with Christ	More churches creating explicit opportunities for exploring Christian faith

NEW ACTIONS TO DATE

Developments to date primarily relate to improvements in the district's own communications and story-sharing capability:

- Subscriptions to all District social media channels have increased significantly over the last 12 months, with regular content being distributed and overall engagement levels broadly maintained despite ending of lockdown restrictions
- Our weekly news email is now sent to 450 people, an increase of 47% since summer 2020, and is opened by over 50% of these.
- District website relaunched in September 2020, support offered to circuits to refresh their websites
- District communications policy created, circuits supported to create policies where relevant

POSSIBLE PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

Some suggested priorities are provided below. Members of the leading team are equally welcome to make other suggestions. If possible, please share additional potential priorities with Gill, Sam and Neil in advance of the meeting so time can be allowed for discussion.

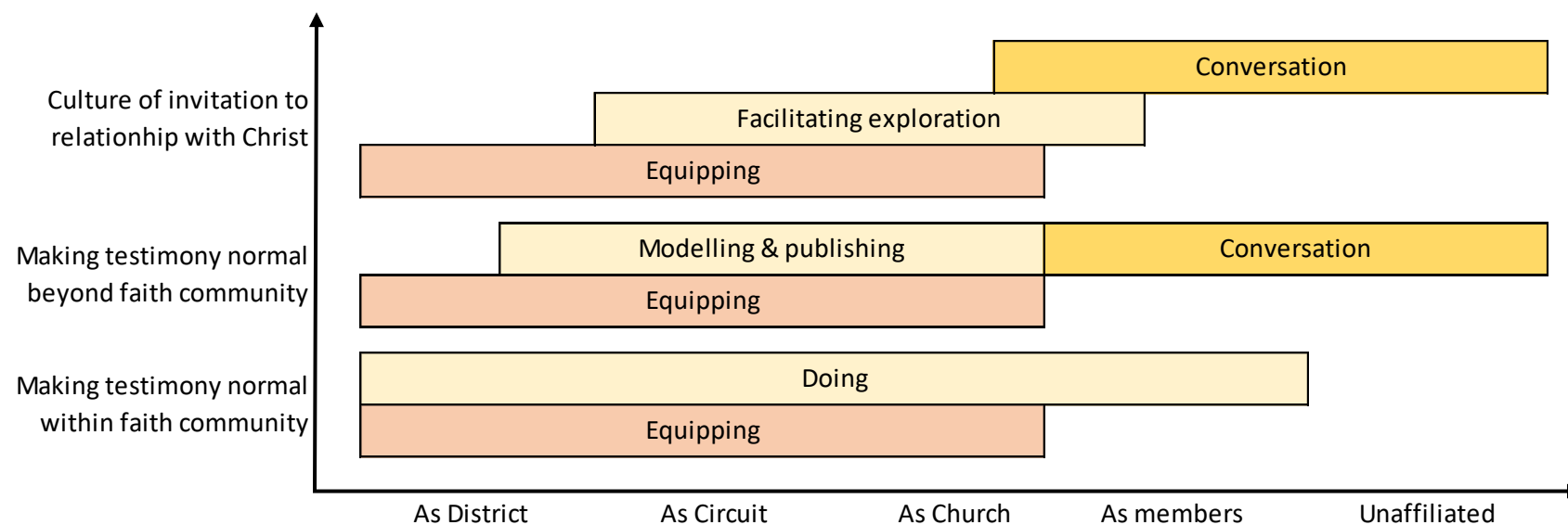
There are two key aspects to resourcing Sharing Stories within our strategy - **WHAT** questions and **HOW** questions

Within the **WHAT** there seems to me to be a progression:



- 1) People first need to **make testimony normal** within worship/ congregational life
- 2) Then to **make testimony normal** beyond the congregation, being comfortable to discuss faith and the interaction between our stories and God's story
- 3) After this to **create a culture of invitation to relationship with Christ** and to provide opportunities to facilitate this introduction.

For each of these stages there are different roles for district, circuits, churches and members, obviously with a high level of nuance to individual context:



Individuals, churches and potentially even circuits will be in different places within this. However because each stage is foundational to the next we are potentially best advised to focus support during the next 12 months on **making testimony normal within worship/ congregational life**.

Ways we can do this include:

- April representative synod being planned to on theme of sharing testimony, with workshops covering a range of media including digital and creative arts. Hope is that this can engage significantly beyond synod membership, as with Radical Hospitality in Doncaster.
- Series of articles/ blogs, e.g. through Mission News
- Publishing testimonies using our media channels (district communications being primarily targeted within Methodism, albeit publicly accessible), making testimony a natural part of our news stories wherever possible
- Syndicating (with agreement) testimonies recorded as part of local church/ circuit worship
- Individual conversations with church/ circuit leaders, understanding context, highlighting support available, sharing best practice across the district

- Conversation with Worship Leaders & Local Preachers meetings
- Modelling use of testimony at district meetings/ events (are we willing to make this a mandated component of every meeting for a year?)

There are already plenty of resources and training materials available, some of which have been circulated already across our churches (Talking Jesus, So What's The Story? etc) so our key task seems primarily to be about overcoming common barriers to behaviour change and sharing local best practice, rather than writing basic training materials.

Key questions for discussion are therefore:

- 1) **Is making testimony normal within worship/ congregation life the right focus for the next 12 months? If not what?**
- 2) **Are these the best ways to go about it? If not what?**

On the **HOW** questions

WEBSITE UPGRADES

Having recreated the district website with support from ThenMedia (Chrestos) we have begun a process of supporting circuits in upgrading/ creating websites to meet current standards, be easy to maintain, and where appropriate having a consistent style. With some circuits, conversations have started but upgrades remain incomplete. We will prioritise completion of these over the coming year.

AUDIT & REACT

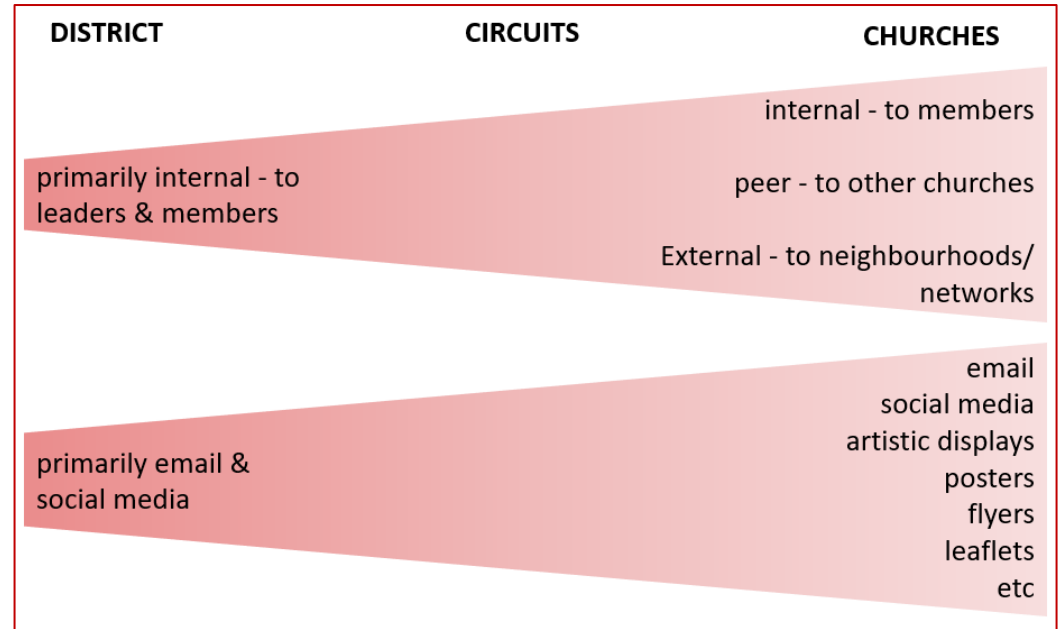
Having made significant progress in growing the audience for district communications over the last two years, we will conduct a rigorous audit of this to understand better our audiences, what messages are most valuable, and anything we should be changing about the method of delivery.

We will then act on this feedback, with the expectation that engagement with our communications will then continue to grow strongly over the next 12 months.

Once we have modelled pro-actively seeking and responding positively to honest feedback, we could offer to support circuits in auditing their own communications and making improvements based on this. We are aware that circuits vary significantly in their communication styles and methods. In part this reflects local context and experience, but from an initial overview there do appear to be obvious opportunities to benefit from sharing of best practice.

If time permits the next extension could be to support some interested churches in auditing their communications, noting that communication channels and purposes become increasingly diverse. All churches will need to become at ease using relevant modern communication tools to share stories, with local context, awareness and capacity varying significantly.

This is likely therefore to be a task for future years.



Key questions for discussion are therefore:

- 1) Are there particular areas we should focus on for audit of district communications?
- 2) Is supporting circuits to review and improve their own communications the best next step?
- 3) Are there any further elements to the HOW of sharing stories we should be concentrating throughout the next 12 months?