

REPORT TO DISTRICT LEADING TEAM – Tuesday July 4th, 2023

REDUCTION IN PRESBYTERAL STAFFING FROM SEPTEMBER 2024

The formation of the Derbyshire North East Circuit in September 2020 saw the establishment of a staff of five presbyters. Four of these were ordained presbyters whose existing appointments were transferred from the two former circuits of Chesterfield and Bolsover & Staveley. A fifth probationer presbyter joined the Circuit at that point and was ordained at the 2022 Conference.

The justification for maintaining this level of staffing during the early years of the new Circuit was a need to consolidate into new ways of working and to establish a fresh missional ethos. Both these tasks became much more difficult than expected as the pandemic curtailed public worship and accelerating the decline in church membership as well as in missional capacity.

At the same time, it was recognised that the Circuit's expenditure would significantly exceed its income at least in the first few years and this would entail drawing on reserves, which it has been able to do. However, since 2020, the Circuit has lost a large amount of income from its churches – almost £100k per annum when adjusted for inflation – as the financial positions of most churches tighten. A recent analysis which assumes no further losses, but no recovery either, predicts that the annual deficit in the operational budget will continue at a level which would require the disposal of a building perhaps once every two to three years. Indeed, two closed chapels have recently been sold and had it not been for the second of these (Barlow & Cutthorpe in 2022) the Circuit would have been in danger of breaching its reserves policy as early as next year.

It is therefore for largely financial reasons that the circuit is looking to reduce its complement of presbyters as a means addressing the ongoing deficit in the Circuit's operational budget.

Accordingly, the Circuit Meeting agreed on 12th June 2023: *"to the reduction from five to three presbyters stationed in the Circuit from September 2024 and also seeks approval of the District Leading Team"*.

A further related issue concerns the need to simplify oversight and trusteeship across the circuit. A draft version of the Circuit Mission Plan had proposed a reorganisation of most local churches into fewer multi-site churches. However, after extensive consultation with Church Councils and congregations more widely, it became apparent that there was no strong support for the idea and that the prospect of achieving this by September 2024 was unrealistic. Consequently, the Circuit Meeting further resolved that *"the Circuit formally suspends its draft plans to adopt a multi-site model of governance and agrees to enter 2024 with the existing church councils intact, but without hinderance to further consideration of multi-site governance or some other change to oversight and trusteeship in the longer-term"*.

The Circuit therefore asks the Sheffield District to:

- **Approve the Circuit's policy to reduce from five to three presbyters in September 2024.**
- **Request the Conference to retain the lines, leave open the possibility that appointments to one or more of the vacant stations might be achievable in the future should circumstances change.**

Rev'd Sean Adair
Superintendent Minister

Roger Jones
Senior Circuit Steward