

BECOMING A GROWING, INCLUSIVE, EVANGELISTIC, JUSTICE SEEKING DISTRICT...



...FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

**Our 2025-2030 plan for
resourcing mission**

Sheffield Methodist District

FOR SUCH A TIME AS 2020 - 2024

For such a time as this was first envisioned in 2019, conversations beginning before the COVID pandemic. It was borne out of reflection on themes of exile, recognising that we were in a liminal moment. Our present was often painfully different from our recent pasts. We knew that our futures would be, and must be, different again.

It heard a call for change through spiritual renewal, not merely through organisational initiatives; keenness to listen, learn and discover our vocation; with ready access to the yokes we need, but free to choose those which fit well; being intentional in our mission but flexible to changing circumstances. We needed to be people of resilient hope, but not afraid of honest lament and grief.

Lacking Christendom privileges, societal influence, financial resources, membership demographics and self-confidence, from a position of brokenness we felt called to risk all that we still had to learn, change and join in *for such a time as this*.

The concept of *for such a time as this* seems to have resonated with many people across and beyond our district. Implementation of the strategy included investment in employment of more district staff, and focused activities and priorities, and we have seen step changes in related aspects of our mission, including:

- **Children, families & youth** – launch of ONE Programme, growing attendance at 3 Generate & relaunch of district youth weekend
- **Property** – gradually increasing confidence to explore opportunities to repurpose chapel premises, albeit with continued reliance on premises not in a good state or repair. Beginning decarbonising our churches.
- **Communications** – strengthened digital presence, greater awareness of the district as a source of support and networking and sharing of stories across our churches
- **HR** – increasingly professionalised approach to employment and recruitment matters
- **Missional mindset** – normalising the concept of pioneering new congregations as a core part of our mission, movement building e.g. encouraging warm spaces

We recognise that this has happened alongside significant turmoil, including a reduction in our numerical membership and ending of several of our congregations.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS 2025-2030

What sort of time will 2025-30 be?

Every place is a patchwork of individuals, families, networks, neighbourhoods and geographies. Each of these will have their own experiences and stories. However we expect significant trends across our district in the coming years to include:

- Social isolation across all demographics
- Significant levels of insecure work/ unemployment (one in five jobs are insecure; one in three jobs are in the public sector and so at risk from pressure on government finances)
- Poverty is widespread (one in four people in poverty, close to half of children in some places) and likely to become deeper and wider. This includes in-work poverty and shortages of affordable housing. Benefits and state funded support are likely to reduce.
- Ageing population – average age in our district is higher than the UK and is increasing
- Risk of loss of faith in democracy/ scapegoating of minorities. Many of our churches are in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, often overlapping with economic marginalisation.
- Public transport provision is poor in many places, albeit bus franchising offers possibility of hope

- Significant levels of new house building, potentially with insufficient infrastructure, will change some communities

Current instabilities in global politics could also have significant and unpredictable local consequences.

Our credibility will rely on being alongside people and supporting them to meet practical needs. Feeling under pressure as an institution, we must not allow seeking the flourishing of our churches to be disassociated from working for the wellbeing of the places in which we live.

People in our churches are also subject to these experiences, which has implications for our expectations on people's wellbeing, availability and contributions. As are many of the charities, community groups and churches of other denominations that we seek to work in partnership with wherever possible. Many of our churches, along with other key components of our social fabric, are reliant on contributions of people significantly past retirement age for their day to day operation.

Much of our scriptures were committed to paper by people in deeply strained circumstances: during invasion, exile or persecution. In a world and neighbourhoods that can seem irreparably broken, and a Methodist movement that can feel overwhelmed and inadequate, the words written on the following pages are written from the conviction that we are called only to notice, be transformed by, and join in with God-on-Mission using the gifts and charisms that God has given us. Under authority of God's prevent, justifying and sanctifying grace, *for such a time as this*.

Our priorities for 2025-30

Our aim is to maintain continuity with the core vision of the last few years, but to refresh our areas of focus in light of our evolving context and what we have learned along the way. We must every day see the world around us through God's loving eyes and recognise afresh the ways in which we have been called and equipped *for such a day as this*. We seek to be rooted in the experiences and values of the people called Methodist in this place, from this to be collectively confident to reimagine church in the differing ways it needs to become *for such a time as we are journeying into*.

Our updated strategic priorities are:

1. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **NEW CHURCHES**
2. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **FLOURISHING CHURCHES**
3. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **REVITALISED CHURCHES**
4. Where it is necessary and appropriate for work to end, it **ENDS WELL** and enables re-creation
5. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **NET ZERO** churches
6. Inclusively **GROWING** evangelistic and justice-seeking **LEADERS**
7. **DIVERSIFIED INCOME** for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches
8. **SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURES** for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches
9. **MISSIONAL PROPERTY** for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches

1. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **NEW CHURCHES**

Our vision: By 2030 to have at least eight fruitful pioneer-led new churches embedded across our circuits. At least half of these will be in Church at the Margins contexts.

In addition to being new and different forms of church through which new people start journeys of Christian discipleship, these will be places of creative learning and experimentation which will inform and enthuse equally valued evolution of inherited churches, volunteer led “fresh expressions” and re-imagining places in which existing forms of church are ending well.

Collectively these will contribute to a financially self-sustaining ecosystem, although we recognise that Churches at the Margins will likely require financial support.

Why is this a priority?

Starting new Christian communities (also known as New Churches, or New Places for New People) is generally considered one of the most effective means of connecting new people, new people groups, and new residents to Christian exploration, community and discipleship. They give us opportunity to engage with people who we are unlikely to reach through our existing churches. Starting new Christian communities makes it easier for us to change our narrative from "come and join us" to "let's journey together", to explore life in all its fullness in new forms moulded in trusting relationships.

These new congregations bring learning from experimental research and development, identify and strengthen emerging leaders, and thus help our circuits and existing churches renew and reimagine their callings.

Key challenges will be:

- Overcoming financial barriers – starting and reaching maturity takes time, often up to ten years
- Access to energy, inspirational stories and relevant expertise found beyond the local context
- Missional courage and imagination may be needed to value to operate and experiment outside of traditional structures and patterns of church, at a time when circuits and existing churches can feel under pressure
- Creating life-giving ways for both new churches and existing churches to be equally contributing and valued partners in their circuits

To enable this District will:

- Make available district staff to **walk alongside** circuits in exploring visions, gather and equip teams and connect with people beyond church. This is likely to be particularly important in initial phases
- Provide **grants** of up to £120k towards employment/ stipend of pioneers, with comprehensive ongoing support and evaluation
- Facilitate **networks and access to learning** for pioneers and others involved in leading of new churches
- Provide expertise to support New Churches in creating healthy and contextual compliance **cultures**, for example with regard to safeguarding.

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our New Churches Support Team

2. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **FLOURISHING CHURCHES**

Our vision: by 2030 to have at least 20 of our existing churches which have grown significantly and become noticeably even more inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking than they are now. At least half of these will be in Church at the Margins contexts.

Indicators of fruitfulness will be defined by each church but could for example look like: significant growth in membership, leadership that is more diverse and representative of its neighbourhood, making new members every year, being known for its contextual justice-seeking priorities.

These churches will be underpinned by a healthy culture of prayer, personal and small group discipleship and a permissive culture that encourages supported innovation. Generally they will be starting from a position of sufficient stability that they can meaningfully set a multi-year growth plan.

Collectively these will contribute to a financially self-sustaining ecosystem, although we recognise that Churches at the Margins will likely require financial support.

Key challenges will be:

- Wisdom to recognise churches which have potential and ambition to flourish, given additional support. These are not necessarily the largest or busiest
- When ministerial time and other resources feel stretched, it can be uncomfortable to prioritise strengths and opportunities, rather than spread equally thinly or reduce costs
- It can be hard for people to identify changes needed to bring increased fruitfulness in their own church
- Churches seeking to flourish can become overburdened, for example through taking on governance roles for other congregations, or through pressure to “succeed”

To enable this District will:

1. **Support circuits** to identify and resource churches with potential and deep desire to grow and become more inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking
2. Offer an external voice into conversations in churches as they discern and implement **growth plans**
3. Bring access to **expertise and resources**, including through district staff, to support churches in implementing their growth plans
4. **Faith Rooted Community Organiser** to walk alongside churches for a fixed period of time (e.g. six months) as they learn to more deeply listen to community needs, gather people and shape church in ways which responds to these
5. Provide **grants** towards employment of lay roles or other non-capital costs which are expected facilitate churches growing and becoming more inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking.
6. Facilitate **cross-circuit learning communit(ies)** for leadership teams of churches with similar characteristics (e.g. Church at the Margins) and willingness to change in order to grow, offering high quality resources, and complementing Connexional networks & resources

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Flourishing Churches Support Team

3. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking REVITALISED CHURCHES

Our vision: When a church in its current form appears to be coming to an end and the congregation feel called to experiment with being church in new contextually relevant ways they will be supported to do so.

Faith Rooted Community Organising practices enable small groups of people to make a significant impact on their neighbourhood. Where a small congregation have an appetite to experiment with fresh ways of being church and have the right support to do so, positive change can happen quickly.

What is possible will be shaped by the gifts and fluctuating availability of unique individuals, so adaptive learning and incremental steps will be more important than rigid long term plans. Sometimes a period of experimentation will lead to a healthy Ending Well rather than long term continuation of a church.

Key challenges will be:

- It is likely that many of our churches or pieces of work within these will face questions about whether to end well or try radically different things in the next few years
- Churches of all denominations in economically marginalised or geographically isolated communities may be at greater risk of ending
- Many churches are reliant on small numbers of people, meaning that their confidence about the future can change suddenly
- Allowing time for experimentation can place additional burdens on ordained ministers and circuit officers
- Revitalisation requires both passion to continue meeting and enthusiasm to try new ways, with the balance of these not always being simple to discern.

To enable this District will:

Support experimentation and re-visioning:

- Make available district staff to walk alongside congregations (and their ministers) at risk of ending and but feeling called to experiment with new ways of being church based on local community needs to connect with new people.
- Provide easily accessible **seed funding** grants towards this experimentation
- provide larger staffing **grants** towards extended experimentation

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Revitalising Churches Support Team

4. Where it is necessary and appropriate for work to end, it **ENDS WELL and enables re-creation**

Our vision:

When a church in its current form appears to be coming to an end and the congregation discern that it is time to end well, this will be recognised as a natural part of the ecosystem of a Connexional church and not a failure.

Chapels which have previously been used by congregations which are Ending Well will always be thoroughly evaluated to discern their future based on their missional, community and financial value.

Congregations started by St Paul and other apostles no longer meet. This does not make them failures – we are part of their enduring legacy. Being church for such a time as this includes starting, ending and reshaping the ways and places in which we gather.

Key challenges will be:

- Ending Well requires investment of time, careful listening and not being rushed, and can stir up powerful feelings of grief for all involved
- It is likely that many of our churches or pieces of work within these will face questions about whether to end well in the next few years
- Churches of all denominations in economically marginalised or geographically isolated communities may be at greater risk of ending
- Many churches are reliant on small numbers of people, meaning that their confidence about the future can change suddenly
- Allowing time for creative repurposing can place additional burdens on ordained ministers and circuit officers

To enable this District will:

Support ending well:

- Tell positive stories in district communications of churches which have Ended Well

Support creative repurposing and restarts:

- Provide **guidance** for robust mission-aligned decisions about future uses of chapel premises, incorporating matters of inclusion and justice-seeking
- Make available district staff to **walk alongside** circuits exploring and implementing new uses for chapel premises
- Provide **grants** towards repurposing of chapel premises and/or recruitment of pioneers to start new churches in these places

5. Growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking **NET ZERO** churches

Our vision:

- By 2030 at least 18 justice-seeking flourishing inherited churches will have become Silver Eco Churches.
- Simple incremental steps in creation care will be a frequent justice seeking route to churches becoming revitalised.
- The district will be widely seen to be “leading by example” on a shared journey to Net Zero through its own activities

By “flourishing” we mean churches which are in a position of sufficient stability to meaningfully write a medium term mission/ growth plan and have potential to grow significantly and become noticeably even more inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking than they are now. These are broad themes, with indicators of fruitfulness and priorities being best defined locally. Stability and level of energy makes assessment against Eco Church criteria and capital-intensive projects more likely to be wise investments.

New churches and fragile churches with willingness to experiment with new ways of being that they might be “revitalised” have an equally significant place in our net zero vision. Such churches will often be reliant on relatively small numbers of people. They are also more likely to change or significantly remodel their places of meeting in the near future.

Key challenges will be:

- High costs of capital expenditure
- Specialist expertise needed to identify carbon-saving measures
- In Church at the Margins contexts or fragile churches, time and effort required to understand and measure compliance with Eco Church requirements may not feel a natural priority. Church members/ building users may be living in fuel poverty with regard to their own homes.
- Lack of awareness may inhibit understanding of the gospel imperative to respond to the climate and nature crises
- Lack of awareness of practical environmental actions that can be taken with minimal cost or effort
- Failure to address our own carbon footprint restricts our missional credibility

To enable this district will:

- Provide subsidised Energy Efficiency Surveys for buildings
- Provide combination of grants/ loans to implement recommendations from Energy Efficiency Surveys
- Facilitate a District Eco Church support network, complementing and signposting other networks, and spreading awareness of how churches could take steps forward
- Model practical and prayerful consideration of environmental impacts of our own activities
- Register as an Eco District and reach Bronze Accreditation
- Achieve EPC energy efficiency rating of C or higher for all residential properties under district trusteeship, and encourage circuits to set their own environmental policies

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Net Zero Support Team

6. Inclusively GROWING evangelistic and justice-seeking LEADERS

The most significant tools for nurturing discipleship and vocation often operate at a local level: discipleship bands/ small groups, discernment courses, mentors/ spiritual directors, away days. As a district we encourage churches to prioritise whatever forms of nurturing disciples are most helpful need to be taken in context.

Our Further/ Higher Education vision: by 2030, we will have supported 15 people to start theological/ missiological qualifications. 10 of these people will be using this qualification to pursue/ deepen a vocation they would otherwise not have been able to.

Key challenges will be:

- Continued availability and accessibility of suitable high quality courses
- Individuals having time and confidence to undertake courses

To enable this District will:

- Provide training grants for relevant theological/ missiological qualifications
- Offer discernment conversations for grant recipients about what comes next for them, and what further support they might require
- Promote relevant courses

Our ONE Programme vision: by 2030 ONE Programme will have expanded to at least eight youth interns per year. Previous interns will testify to transformational impact of the ONE Programme for them.

ONE Programme has been effective to date because it is shaped around the specific young person and provides accountability, protection, cohort and developmental teaching.

Key challenges will be:

- Presently some of our circuits have small numbers of young people
- Proactive and early conversations with potential interns, line managers, mentors and church councils

To enable this District will:

- Oversee and proactively promote the programme
- Subsidise cost for participating circuits/churches
- Facilitate supportive networking between previous interns

Our Growing Leaders Programme vision: by 2030 people from across our district will have grown as key leaders in their church or circuit or other missional ventures through participation in this new programme. Previous participants will testify to transformational impact of the programme for them, and will be integral to trailblazing new mission.

The Growing Leaders Programme will incorporate key success factors from the ONE Programme, but tailored to be relevant for people with a wide spread of ages and life experiences (learning and growing is not reserved for the young). It will include access to high quality relevant teaching, individual coaching and commitment to participation in a mutually supportive cohort.

Key challenges will be:

- People who are likely to benefit will potentially have multiple existing commitments, and so the programme will need to be obviously valuable for them and flexible to their schedules
- Bringing together best of Connexional and other already existing resources, alongside new local input into a coherent package
- Range of specialist support will need to be tailored to diverse needs of participants
- Sufficient pool of trained coaches/ mentors

To enable this District will:

- Research, pilot and roll out the programme

Our Supervision vision: by September 2026 all ordained ministers and lay staff across the district will be receiving effective reflective supervision and line management as appropriate to their roles.

Reflective supervision and line management have been shown to have a significant effect on the wellbeing of postholders and the impactfulness of their roles.

We are starting from a position where reflective supervision has been fully rolled out for ordained ministers.

Key challenges will be:

- Shortage of trained reflective supervisors and line managers
- Line management and supervision requires upfront investment of time, with the benefits being long term

To enable this District will:

- Recruit and arrange training for new supervisors
- Coordinate supervisees and supervisors across our circuits

Our networks vision: to continue to facilitate cross-circuit networks learning and mutual support in ways which are relevant and helpful for those involved. People will always have the opportunity to connect with some others doing similar in other contexts (where these exist).

Networks already exist ecumenically, Connexionally and within circuits. We will complement rather than duplicate these

Key challenges will be:

- When people are busy, networking can be squeezed out by urgent tasks
- Information about networks may not reach potential participants
- People come to roles with different ways of working, preferences and prior experience. Networks/ events for people in similar sounding roles may not meet diverse needs

To enable this District will support in particular:

- Circuit stewards - key lay leaders who need to hold continuity of vision for their circuits
- Superintendents – key connecting ordained leaders
- Role-based networks – continuing to develop existing and new role based networks
- Inspirational large scale youth events – building from significant growth in engagement with 3Generate and District Youth Day

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Growing Leaders Support Team

7. DIVERSIFIED INCOME for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches

Our vision:

To create a new district-managed recurring income stream to fund local mission from residential lettings, by redeveloping former chapels where there is no viable missional or community use. Where feasible this will be in the form of affordable or specialist housing. By 2030 our aspirational target is to be generating annual cash flows of £100k.

To enable circuits to create their own contextual additional income streams

Diversify our recurring income away from reliance on congregational giving enhances our ability to be a justice seeking growing evangelistic church which prioritises economically marginalized communities.

Circuits would be financially compensated for contributing properties for redevelopment.

Residential redevelopments will be managed by professional staff and managing trusteeship held by district, freeing circuits to concentrate on mission, rather than investment management.

In the longer term future, some of these properties may house pioneers, or be turned back into meeting places for New Churches.

Key challenges will be:

- Identifying suitably gifted staff and teams
- Sourcing start-up capital
- As a numerically shrinking organisation we have become accustomed to a culture of scarcity
- Whilst income generation is necessary, it must not become a distraction from our core missional purposes

To create residential lettings income District will:

- Undertake a range of pilot schemes
- Prepare a robust business plan, including taking appropriate professional advice
- Proactively and sensitively incorporate exploration of potential sites into Ending Well property evaluations

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Residential Property Income Support Team

To enable local income diversification District will:

- Encourage and share ideas and resources across circuits
- Support circuits in establishing new income sources

8. SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURES for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches

Our vision: by 2030 most ministers, lay staff and voluntary officers will notice that Methodist procedures remain sufficiently robust but are noticeably simpler than other organisations they are involved in.

Key challenges will be:

- Reductions in numbers of churches and membership indicated by our demography, irrespective of future growth, may make circuits as currently understood an impractical governance framework.
- Some complexity is due to legislation or other factors beyond local control

- Many compliance obligations are reasonable in isolation but collectively impractical
- Procedural simplification may require accepting a higher level of compliance risk, or reduction in influence or data, or not including some people
- Procedural complexity is introduced by many different bodies having rights to demand information or actions from churches and circuits
- Administration can become a diversionary activity to put off tasks which are uncomfortable but more important
- Long term simplification often requires upfront time investment in remodelling and retraining

To enable this District will:

- Provide constructive but robust feedback and disruptive thinking to identify alternative processes
- Share learning between circuits as they experiment with ways to bring together myriad governance requirements into practical checklists etc
- Proactively seek out complexity/ areas of difficulty and enable simplification
- Model use of technology to reduce administrative tasks
- Each year reduce the overall time spent by churches and circuits on compliance tasks instructed by District
- If relevant, work with circuits to create a more efficient and sufficiently robust legal framework for larger-than-church governance which preserves locally contextual oversight of mission and ministry.
- Develop dialogue with local enabling ministries in other denominations, so we can share best practice, resources and insights where beneficial

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Simplifying Procedures Support Team

9. MISSIONAL PROPERTY for growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches

Our vision: for property to be consistently seen as an asset which can be confidently used to resource growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking churches

Strategic decision making about investment in property:

- **New churches** – property projects will be aligned to the agreed vision and purpose
- **Flourishing churches** - property projects will be aligned to agreed growth plan
- **Circuit mission plans** – in churches where it is not appropriate for the local congregation to invest time in writing a long term growth plan (for example churches exploring revitalising or ending well), decisions about investment and capital repairs will be informed by agreed circuit mission plan
- **Ending well** – chapels which have previously been used by congregations which are Ending Well will always be thoroughly evaluated to discern their future based on their missional, community and financial value. District guidance will be made available to facilitate this process, including the justice-seeking implications and interaction with the new residential lettings vision.

Property grants of up to £20k will continue to be offered for major property schemes.

Implementation of this vision will be overseen by our Property & Mission Support Team