

Circuit Vision

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the
heavens
Ecclesiastes 3:1



The Methodist Church



**WOLVERHAMPTON CIRCUIT
FEBRUARY 2023**

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Section 1

Organisational Background

1.1 The Methodist Church is a connexion. The essence of which means that all members are interdependent and that we collectively form the body of Christ. This is countercultural to the prominent individualism of the day. For the Circuit this means that we are not a group of individual congregationally governed churches, but a group of 18 interdependent churches that are bonded together as part of the wider church called Methodist.ⁱ The significance of which is that we are called together collectively to discern what God is calling us to do in this moment and to move forward together.

1.2 In her Conference Report of 2017, *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, the Revd Dr Nicola V Price-Tebbutt states:

'In Called to Love and Praiseⁱⁱ, the essence of connexionalism is identified and defined in terms of belonging, mutuality and interdependence. All Christians are essentially linked to one another; no Local Church is or can be an autonomous unit complete in itself. This understanding of the essence of the Church is grounded in the New Testament. It is vital for effective mission, and it is expressed in apt structures of oversight, balancing authority and subsidiarity. Where these insights have become part of the ethos of the Church, connexionalism is experienced in a way of life which assumes that all contribute to and receive from the life and mission of the whole Church.'

1.3 Standing Order 500(1) states:

'The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.... The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit,....'ⁱⁱⁱ

1.4 So as we move forward connexionally, how might we move from monitoring declining attendance across the circuit to seeing God's kingdom grow. The eight core practices of growing churches set out below are taken from research conducted by the Church of England in 2011-2013, the findings of which are explored in *From Evidence to Action*, and the *Leading Together* research by the Methodist Church in 2015-2016.

- Growing churches have a clear mission and purpose
- Growing churches know and serve their communities
- Growing churches offer welcome and follow up

- Growing churches offer discipleship pathways
- Growing churches have transformational leaders
- Growing churches involve all people
- Growing churches change and adapt
- Growing churches connect with young people

1.5 What is the church?

1.6 A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists answers this question as follows:

'The Church is all those on earth and in heaven who have been called by God through Jesus Christ, to be his people, and who share the unity that the Spirit gives. The Spirit guides the Church and equips its members with varied gifts, so that they may support one another, encourage one another and serve their neighbours with joy. The universal Church takes the form of local congregations, where the message of Christ received through the apostles is preached where God is glorified in the celebration of the sacraments and other acts of worship, and Christians share the Christian life.'^{iv}

Section 2 The Current Position

2.1 The Wolverhampton Circuit was formed in 2008 when three local circuits came together; namely, Bilston, Darlington Street and Trinity. It was stated at the time that the rationale for the uniting of the previous circuits was to share resources - of money, of staff, of skills - more effectively and that the united circuit would provide the administrative structure to do that.

2.2 The Circuit covers 252.94 square miles and contains a population of 326,740.

2.3 The Circuit currently has:

- 1000+ members
- approx. 500 people in worship every Sunday morning
- 6.5fte ordained staff
- a number of lay employees
- 18/19 active local preachers
- 26 buildings (5 manses, 21 churches, 3 up for sale)
- 1 Local Ecumenical Partnership (St. Andrews)
- spans 3 Local Authority Boundaries (Dudley, South Staffs, Wolverhampton)
- influence at Local, District, Regional, Connexional, and international level

2.4 The circuit is made up of 18 active church congregations and has a developing city centre ministry. The church congregations are:

- Beckminster (113)vi
- Bilston (46)
- Bradley (19)
- Brewood (19)
- Codsall (143)
- Coven (10)
- Cranmer (24)
- East Park (19)
- Fallings Park (79)
- Hurst Hill (22)
- Lanesfield (85)
- Rakegate (16)
- St. Andrews (123)
- St. Johns (104)
- Springdale (107)
- Stratton Street (19)
- Upper Ettingshall (29)

- Womborne (67)

2.5 The Circuit has a City Centre Ministry. Its current form was started with a blank canvass approach. The remit was to wait to see what God wants. There were established relationships in the City which were to be continued and new ones were to be established. This ministry is outward facing. There has been a clear geographical boundary placed upon this work which is within the ring-road. There is also a recognition of capacity constraints, this work being led by a full-time diaconal appointment and also supported by a part-time Pioneer Ministry post. There is currently no physical base for this work, it being conducted out and about in the City Centre.

2.6 This work includes:

- Maintaining work with the Good Shepherd (despite the fact that this is based the other side of the ring road).
- Inter faith group
- City of Sanctuary – drop in every Wednesday to see refugees and asylum seekers
- Coffee morning at a community café every Friday
- Ecumenical work – fortnightly meetings with Rectors and participation in services.
- All Civic links and ceremonial, building on excellent civic relationships in the City Centre, providing a Christian and Methodist presence within local City authorities
- Good Friday walk of witness & city centre nativity
- Chaplaincy to shops
- Wolverhampton Business Breakfast club
- Wolverhampton LGBT+ (informal chaplaincy)
- Undertaking a listening missional process, to discern what a Christian presence (and possible ecclesial community) might look like in the City Centre

2.7 This City Centre Ministry is funded from ring-fenced finances.

2.8 The Circuit has further ministry that takes place beyond the confines of its buildings. There is regular staff led worship at Engelberg and support given to the chaplain. There is other ministry taking place in a number of care homes across the Circuit. There are long standing relationships with local schools. This work includes assemblies, Open the Book, RE specialist days, chaplaincies and governor relationships. This is not an exhaustive list as other work takes place across the Circuit within the community.

2.9 Membership and attendance figures have been declining across the circuit for a number of years. Against a straight-line trend analysis, there will be no

members in 15 years at the current rate of decline. Similar analysis of weekly attendance shows all churches will have ceased to meet within the next 5 years if attendance trends continue on their current path^{vii}.

2.10 The Circuit Finances Year ending 31st August 2022 saw a General Fund deficit of **£112,000**. Previous years' figures similarly show the Circuits expenditure exceeding income.

Year-end	Income	Expenditure	Balance
2018	£540,787.00	£601,599.00	-£ 60,812.00
2019	£512,993.00	£583,584.00	-£ 70,591.00
2020	£545,399.00	£596,033.00	-£ 50,634.00
2021	£476,169.00	£621,639.00	-£145,470.00

Over the last 5 years the total Circuit deficit funded from reserves is **£439,507.00**. This continuing position of deficit is not sustainable.

2.11 The recent Circuit asset audit revealed:

- In the financial year to 31st August 2021 9 out of the 18 churches were running at a deficit
- Financial year ending 31st August 2021 the churches in the Circuit made an overall loss of £30,000
- Collectively the churches had £750,000 in reserves as at August 2021
- Individual churches in deficit could support this from their reserves at the current rate of loss between 1 and 118 years
- 2 churches have indicated they will not be able to meet their circuit assessment contributions this current year

2.12 Some churches are financially comfortable, but many are struggling to break even and do not have reserves to cover their expenditure for more than a few years.

2.13 Conversations have taken place with groups of members from each church. The following themes have come out of these conversations:

- Not everyone has come back to worship after the pandemic
- Volunteers within churches are tired
- Sometimes plans are restricted by a lack of resources (money, space, qualified volunteers, accessibility, etc)
- Some would like to do more work with young people, but you haven't got the people to lead the work
- There is a lot of anxiety about the future of our churches.
- The world has changed because of covid

2.14 The Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) have presented to the Circuit Meeting that:

- The circuit is running at a deficit
- The circuit is losing congregants
- Some of our buildings are not fit for purpose
- There is a legacy of closing dangerous buildings, which is costly in time, money and energy.
- Fewer volunteers are coming forward to take key roles
- the preaching plan cannot be resourced
- **God is calling us to change.**

Section 3

Our Vision for the Future

3.1 The Circuit Meeting authorised the CLT to undertake a review of the Circuit. The following milestones have been addressed:

- Summer 2021
 - CLT consultation over possible models of circuit oversight and governance.
 - CLT scope a property and assets review
- September 2021
 - Identification of Conference decisions on oversight and trusteeship
- Circuit meeting September 2021
 - Property and asset review process proposed
- Autumn 2021
 - Completion of property and asset review
 - CLT scope a local church review
- Circuit meeting February 2022
 - CLT to report on property and assets review
 - Local church review process proposed
- Spring 2022
 - Local church review conducted
- July 2022
 - CLT Vision Planning Day
- Circuit Meeting September 2022
 - Outputs of Circuit Planning Day presented to Circuit Meeting
- Autumn 2022
 - Conversation with Churches
- February 2023
 - Report to Circuit Meeting

3.2 The CLT came together for a day in July 2022 to discuss and discern what God was calling the Circuit to be. This day was externally facilitated. The following aims and values came out of that day.

3.3 The aims for the Circuit are:

- Courageous Discipleship
- Inspiring and diverse worship
- Meeting needs

3.4 The core values of the Circuit are:

- Faith

- Love
- Creativity
- Openness
- Competency
- Justice
- Community influence

3.5 These aims and values were presented to the Circuit Meeting in September 2022.

3.6 Any proposals for the future of the Circuit need to be measured against the achievement of these aims and are to be implemented in line with the core values.

3.7 Over the autumn of 2022 a number of conversations took place with churches and church councils structured around the presentation that was made to the Circuit Meeting in September 2022. The following were heard at these events:

- There was a broad understanding of the case for change.
- There was a request to get on with something
- Why are we taking our time
- We have got to do something. Doing nothing was not an option
- Most were interested in their church and how it might impact on them
- We're alright, it's not our problem
- There was a surprising amount of positivity. This exercise was a refreshing change and were glad for the direction.
- Some found it hard to respond when asked what would happen if we were to do nothing and quickly went into what we need to do
- There was a desire to be told an outcome, whilst at the same time not wanting it
- There should be a collaborative approach to churches and buildings
- We should look at churches and their proximity to one another
- Churches were losing members and people were not taking on jobs
- What else do we expect when we don't tell people what we are doing
- Buildings were consuming too much resource
- There was a recognition of the need for fewer buildings
- Some churches were focused on what they do in their building during the week rather than what they do in respect of worship on a Sunday
- Should we not have one building and everything be based from that
- This was not about buildings per se but about mission
- Some were not attached to buildings and where God was leading they felt free to go
- The closure of churches had to be managed well
- There was an expression that people were tired

- There was a feeling of vulnerability among some
- Some felt they could not invest in long term planning
- We must learn new things and new ways of being church
- There was an expressed readiness to learn
- There was support for the analysis that had taken place to date
- It was questioned whether South Staffordshire and the City of Wolverhampton fitted together
- What is our unique selling point as Methodists
- Should we not be looking to our ecumenical partners
- Valuing people and ministry was more helpful than pointing out lack of money
- Some said we have had these conversations before and there is nothing new.

*Even the stork in the sky
knows her appointed seasons,
and the dove, the swift and the thrush
observe the time of their migration.
But my people do not know
the requirements of the Lord.*

Jeremiah 8:7

3.8 Courageous Discipleship

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord
your God will be with you wherever you go.*

Joshua 1:9

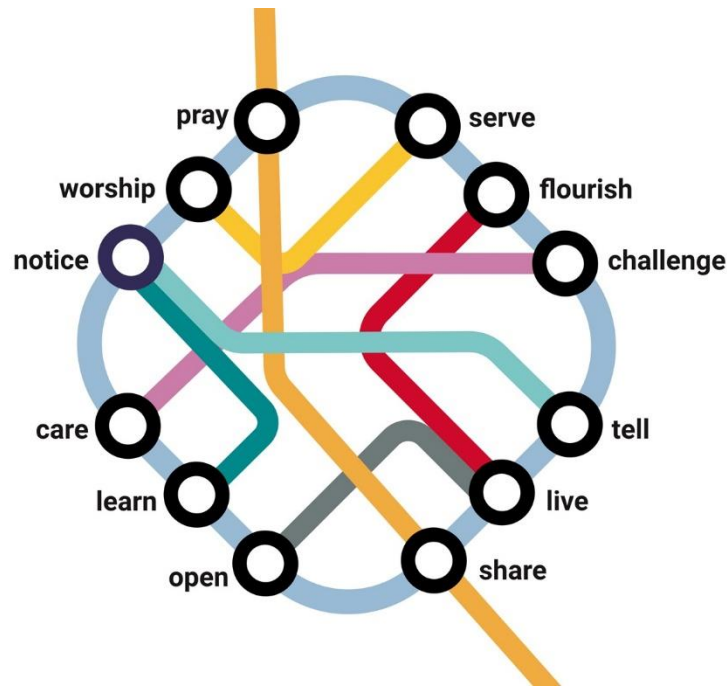
3.8.1 What is our discipleship model?

‘The process of discipleship aligns our lives to keep following Jesus, and becoming more like him. We do this as individuals and a community by shared spiritual practices and reflecting together. Discipleship is a dynamic

process. The path is not normally linear, but more like travelling on a train network.

- Each station is a place where disciples grow in maturity, and step out in mission and action.
- We learn as we reflect together on what happens at each station.
- The Holy Spirit should be driving! We go where the train takes us.^{viii}

3.8.2 Methodist Way of Life



3.8.3 A Methodist Way Of Life expands the Methodist Church's core Our Calling statement, and provides a rhythm to live life. There are twelve practices that will help us mature as disciples, welcome others into the church community, and be part of a missional church together.

3.8.4 What is Courageous Discipleship? 'Don't build an altar to former things. This is a time of climate change. When the climate changes, different things grow.'

3.8.5 The Revd Graham Carter in his Presidential address in 2006 said:

'Christ calls us to be prepared to leave home and follow him. Our 'home' is whatever we are familiar and comfortable with but the call to discipleship is a call to walk with strangers, tread unfamiliar paths and risk doing new things.'

3.8.6 The Revd Martyn Atkins when he was General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain in his book 'Discipleship... ..and the people called Methodists' wrote:

*'Methodist Christian discipleship is
 rooted in and focussed on Jesus Christ,
 resourced by the Spirit of God,
 is both life-long and whole-life,
 communal rather than solitary,
 committed to transforming and serving 'the world',
 locally, nationally and globally
 and so is lived out on a 'big map',
 all offered as worship to God as loving obedience.'*^{ix}

3.8.7 We regularly sing of courageous discipleship:

*Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
 To work, and speak, and think for thee;
 Still let me guard the holy fire,
 And still stir up thy gift in me –
 Ready for all thy perfect will,
 My acts of faith and love repeat,
 Till death thy endless mercies seal,
 And make the sacrifice complete.*^x

3.8.8 We annually pray at our Covenant Service:

*I am no longer my own but yours.
 Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
 wherever you may place me,
 in all that I do
 and in all that I may endure;
 when there is work for me
 and when there is none;
 when I am troubled
 and when I am at peace.
 Your will be done
 when I am valued
 and when I am disregarded;
 when I find fulfilment
 and when it is lacking;
 when I have all things,
 and when I have nothing.
 I willingly offer
 all I have and am
 to serve you,
 as and where you choose.*

*Glorious and blessed God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,*

*you are mine and I am yours.
 May it be so for ever.
 Let this covenant now made on earth
 be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.^{xi}*

3.8.9 So courageous discipleship, as Rev Martyn Atkins tells us, includes:

Living out shared discipleship which is open, accountable, inviting, challenging, demanding, nourishing and life-giving. To belong to it is transformative – of self, of community, and ultimately of the world, because it is led and resourced by the Holy Spirit.^{xii}

3.8.10 John Wesley in his sermon 'On Zeal' wrote that Christian zeal is:

“no other than the flame of love.”

3.8.11 He further stated:

‘Here... is the great object of Christian zeal. Let every true believer in Christ apply, with all fervency of spirit, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that hearts may be more and more enlarged in love to God and all people.’

3.8.12 What would the impact of courageous discipleship be on the Wolverhampton Circuit? The Circuit would be a community seeking to deepen faith. Christian formation and development would be facilitated and expected. We will explore new ways of learning and being church. This would move us out of our comfort zone and there would be opportunities to develop spiritual practice.

3.8.13 The Methodist Way of Life would be lived out and reflected in prayer, bible study and support for one another. We would meet in small groups and units, gathering in places outside of our buildings. We would rediscover the joy of the cell group, house group, small group. These would be places of invitation and building relationships. These would be places of conversation.

3.8.14 We would be outward facing, talking about Jesus and meeting needs practically. There would be a boldness in going out. The church venturing out would be normal, encouraging people to know Jesus – how He transforms our lives and society. Our mission would be to those beyond the threshold.

3.8.15 People would be able to tell their story unedited. We will have dialogue with people and share our faith journey. Others will experience courageous discipleship through the telling of stories in a clear and visible way. We will acknowledge that we are not doing enough story sharing. We will recognise

the power in our message and no longer keep it to ourselves. We will speak confidently about Jesus.

- 3.8.16 We would see our mission delivered collectively as a Circuit. As Rev Atkins challenges we would be able to demonstrate a 'shared discipleship which is open, accountable, inviting, challenging, demanding, nourishing and life-giving.'
- 3.8.17 We would be in relationship together recognising the unique calling that God has given the Methodist people in this place. People will feel connexion and feel connected. We would stand alongside one another, turning around our focus to the outside and we would be confident in ourselves. There would be space for people feel safe and connected with. A place of friendship and kindness.
- 3.8.18 Our people will be able to express rich welcome and hospitality. We will offer a space where people find a home. We will be open and generous spirited. We will allow space to be, but the invitation is to come and join us. Peoples' first encounter will leave them in no doubt that we know what we are doing and why. We will be rooted in the local community and the world. We will be brave, unsettled, prophetic, transitional and risk taking. We will learn to walk in another's shoes.
- 3.8.19 This will express itself in a willingness to take brave decisions and follow them through together. We will collectively face tough choices and learn to disagree well. We will have different views, but having heard one another, we will move forward together. There will be a preparedness to make mistakes and to recognise somethings are only for a season. We would deal with not only the now but prepare for the future. We will sit with the messiness, yet be bold to move forward.
- 3.8.20 This will be modelled at a leadership level. The Circuit meeting leading and local courageous discipleship being seen at local church level. The Circuit would ensure its leaders were resourced. There will be clear communication of the direction we are going in and how everybody can be involved. There will be an honouring of different gifts and talents. There will be support and encouragement for each to feel secure whilst stepping out courageously to play their part. Participation will be encouraged.

3.9 Inspiring and diverse worship

*Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with timbrel and harp.*

Psalm 149:3

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Romans 12:1

3.9.1 What is worship?

3.9.2 A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists answers this question as follows:

“To worship is joyfully to proclaim, in the power of the Spirit, the wonderful acts of God and to celebrate his glorious nature. We worship God, not only in formal or informal acts of worship, but also with our lives, by serving him in serving other people.”^{xiii}

3.9.3 Worship: Foundations - An introduction to preparing and leading worship in the Methodist Church reminds us:

‘... the ‘menu’ for worship, whether it be traditional in form, café style, Messy Church or an informal praise service, might be divided into gathering, hearing, responding, sending.

- *Gathering brings us into a deeper awareness of God's presence.*
- *Hearing God's Word affirms the greatness and goodness of a God who acts to save us. (This is also known as ‘The Ministry of the Word’.)*
- *Responding is our way of reflecting on and deepening our relationship with God.*
- *Sending encourages us to live out our discipleship in the world’^{xiv}*

3.9.4 And:

In the preparation and delivery of worship, you are aiming to lead without getting in the way of God and God's people. So take time to be still and to pray. No matter how many acts of worship we have prepared or led, we need to remember this is about, and for, God^{xv}

3.9.5 The English word ‘worship’ means ‘worthship’ and denotes the worthiness of the individual receiving the special honour due to their worth. Our focus in worship then is to give honour to God and to encounter him. All of God's people need to be enabled to give Him honour and to encounter him. God is the recipient of worship that is inspiring, creative, participatory and engaging.

3.9.6 Why do we want inspiring and diverse worship? No one size fits all in worship. Just as each of us chose to access news from different sources and

just as each of us chose to listen to different types of music, we all respond to different things in worship. We look for something that touches us, it may be in the singing or in the word. It will be different things for different people. It will be found in different types of style – praise, meditation, lona, Taizé, plain song, silence, written liturgy, impromptu, extempore The list goes on and there are forms yet to be revealed and prompted by the Spirit. Yet, we are called together collectively to bring of our best to God to honour him. We are all enabled to do this if we have inspiring and diverse worship.

- 3.9.7 The worship of God should involve our whole being and challenge us. It should stretch us and draw us out beyond our own imposed limitations. The image of God is limitless and this should prompt growth.
- 3.9.8 Many find comfort in a ‘traditional service’. However, this statement in itself is problematical. With a little investigation and conversation, it soon becomes clear that what is ‘traditional’ to one is unknown to another. It is more accurate to say that we all find comfort in what we know. All of us come to worship with different expectations and experience. We also want to offer a generous welcome to those who may encounter worship for the first time and those who are yet to find what gives them ‘comfort’.
- 3.9.9 Each worshipping community would be asked to think through different types of worship. Whilst worship is ultimately for God, the question is who is worship for? Is it for this congregation? Is it shaped by what key leaders want or their gifts? Is it for the congregation that is not attending?
- 3.9.10 To enable this, the aim is to provide a range of worship in different places and different times. A suite of different worship opportunities offered in the Circuit throughout the week. It is recognised that currently our resources are stretched, but this is the aim.
- 3.9.11 Within these different worship opportunities, there would be an opportunity for more discussion, interaction and participation in worship. An enabling of congregations to offer what they bring, collectively and individually. Each member would be encouraged to recognise what they bring to the worshipping life of the Circuit. There would also be the provision of the more ‘traditional’. There would be an important space for narration within worship – the narration of the story of the people of God in the Wolverhampton Circuit.
- 3.9.12 It is not envisaged that this would result in a constantly changing form and variety of worship at each location and time. There would be a clear understanding of what style to expect at each location and time to encourage spiritual development and growth. The range would be provided across the Circuit.

- 3.9.13 The aim is that all worship would be confidently led and that there would be a diversity of leadership. Leaders of worship would be supported and equipped. All worship would be relational, inclusive and authentic.
- 3.9.14 The aim is to provide a range of worship experience that brings joy and anticipation. Our worship should inspire existing members, those who visit, the community and our neighbours. New people should feel enabled to join us. Our worship should be like the Emmaus story – a place of encounter with Jesus where hearts are set aflame.
- 3.9.15 A church at worship should reflect the community in which it is or the community to which it offers ministry. We should be a worshipping community throughout the week.
- 3.9.16 There is a great wealth and strength in our current worship. This is not to be set aside, but to be built upon. There is gratitude to those who put themselves forward to lead worship. We would build on their contribution and the heritage of worship that we have inherited. This is not about doing less, but offering more. A seeking to recognise our whole lives as worship and an honouring of God.

3.10 Meeting Needs

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Matthew 25:35-36

- 3.10.1 Meeting needs involves physical, emotional and spiritual need. At its essence this is about the Circuit epitomising – loving one another and loving our neighbour.
- 3.10.2 The future vision of the Circuit needs to provide structures, resources and skills to care for and walk with its church members and adherents. This will include pastoral support, opportunities for developing and exercising ministry, opportunities for service, opportunities for learning and growth. It will also involve capacity for appropriate practical support and help.
- 3.10.3 This aim also covers responding to the needs of local communities where God has placed us, together with our response to national and international need. The demand here is enormous and clearly the Circuit will never have

the resources to meet all need. The Circuit, however, ought to have the capacity to discern where God is calling us to respond. Who is the neighbour that others are passing by? Who are we called to partner with? What national or international need is God laying on our hearts that collectively we are called to act upon.

3.10.4 In terms of the 'Methodist Way of Life' this aim covers:

- Care – We care for ourselves and those around us
- Open – We practice hospitality and generosity
- Serve – We help people in our communities and beyond
- Challenge – We challenge injustice.

3.10.5 Any future plans for the Circuit should enable us to love one another and our neighbour.

3.10.6 There are many needs that we may be drawn to address, but we don't need to do it all. There are others more adequately skilled or equipped that are already attending to need that we should know about and signpost others too. There are those with a common calling that we might partner with to address a particular need.

3.10.7 We should be engaged in our communities, open and welcoming, caring for the world around, not focused on self-preservation but outward looking. We should have a new sense of social holiness and work out our distinctive offering within this.

3.10.8 What is our distinctive contribution to the communities in which we have been placed? We need to listen to our local community and to do so we need to have networks in these communities. We need to have conversations with those already active in the community. We need to start by knowing the needs of our community and who else is working in this space – whether this be secular or faith based. We need to stop and listen and not rush in. We need to stop thinking that we know what is needed. We work smart, where we can make a difference. We must not lose sight of the importance of the small things we can do. What is the gap into which we should stand? The church is there to bring people together, foster connections and build relationships.

3.10.9 We have a model to follow in identifying our role in meeting needs in the way we have been pursuing our City Centre Ministry since the closure of Darlington Street. This is a model of going out, networking, talking to the community and responding to what you hear and see.

3.10.10 We need to meet the needs of our church communities. What is happening in people's lives? Are we building one another up? Do we provide a safe space where it is okay to struggle? Are we providing places of trust

and openness. We need to start by knowing the individuals that make up a congregation. This is relational. We need to stop and listen and not rush in. We need to stop thinking that we know what is needed. How do we respond pastorally to our people?

3.10.11 We cannot be all things to all people. What are our limitations? What can we do and offer? What is important that we do in each space? What are the giftings that God has given us?

3.10.12 In meeting needs of one another and our neighbours, we are not doing this too people, but with people. We demonstrate we are prepared to stand in their shoes. We show that we are able to change with communities and for people. We offer hospitality to all and challenge injustice where we encounter it.

Section 4

Options for Change

*See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah 43:19

Options for Presence

4.1 Do nothing

4.1.1 An option is to do nothing. If this course is pursued then it is likely that the Circuit and the Churches would become unviable within 5 years. To date there has been a series of Church closures when societies have become unviable either because of a lack of finance, building deficiencies, a lack of attendance or a combination of these. The Circuit has been reactive to these situations and acted out of necessity rather than being proactive and strategic in its decision making. This has been expensive both in terms of resources, time and energy. If the 'do nothing' option were adopted the Circuit would continue to be in reactive mode and dealing with an increasing number of critical incidents. This would probably take most of CLTs bandwidth and leave little resource for Mission. There was very little sense that members wanted a 'do nothing' option in the conversations that took place with Churches in the autumn. This option would not achieve the Circuit aims and would challenge the Circuit's core values.

4.2 No buildings

4.2.1 This option would see the Circuit divest itself of all its buildings and seek alternative space from which to worship and undertake its other activities. Many comments have been received as to the burden that our buildings pose – the expense of maintenance, the difficulty in finding property stewards, the bureaucracy that goes with property ownership. This option would free the Churches and Circuit from this and enable our focus to be elsewhere.

4.2.2 This option would require the Circuit to source alternative space that could be hired for its purposes. This would require the Circuit to have a clear understanding of what these requirements were and the drafting of a clear specification. Once a clear specification was available the feasibility of finding the required space to be hire in the locations required would need to be undertaken.

- 4.2.3 One of the benefits of this solution is its flexibility in that, provided no long-term leases/agreements are not entered into, the space hired could easily be flexed to meet the Circuits future and changing needs.
- 4.2.4 There are many examples of Christian Communities meeting in school halls and community centres.
- 4.2.5 This option would allow the disposal of all buildings. The net worth of these assets are unknown, but clearly such a significant disposal would give a one-off boost to Circuit reserves. What is unknown at this time, alongside availability of such space for hire, is the ongoing cost of this option.
- 4.2.6 This option would remove the opportunities that currently exist for the Churches to facilitate other community groups and activities that use their premises. This would require a rethink as to how we achieved community engagement. It would also mean that any income stream from lettings would be lost. Across the Circuit, this would lead to a loss of £ (Can we calculate this figure?)
- 4.2.7 There would continue to be a requirement on the Circuit to provide accommodation for its ministers.
- 4.2.8 If this option were adopted, consideration would have to be given as to how the Circuit and Churches remain visible within the communities that we worship in and serve?
- 4.2.9 How would this option facilitate our aims and values?

4.3 New builds

- 4.3.1 Over a period of time all of the current church buildings would be sold and the proceeds of sale used to undertake a number of new builds. The closure of churches is difficult and emotive. The movement of members from one church to another can be a barrier, as the moving members feel loss of identity and it can be perceived as a takeover by the receiving church. The rationale here is that by closing all churches these feelings are overcome. All members have to move. All members move to a new neutral space. All members feel that they are participating in an exciting and new venture.
- 4.3.2 The other rationale for this move is that all new builds would be built to meet current needs and would free the circuit from the current building impediments that it is currently managing.

- 4.3.3 This option would result in a reduction in the number of Churches. When this suggestion came up in conversation with the Churches in the autumn, anything from 1 to 6 new builds was discussed.
- 4.3.4 The difficulty with this option is that, whilst the current value of the churches is unknown, the current value being realised from the disposals that the CLT is currently handling, would suggest that even if all property assets were realised it is unlikely that it would be sufficient to fund a significant building project. Also currently reserves generated from such sales are being used to cover day to day expenditure (budget deficits).
- 4.3.5 This proposal would also lead the Circuit into a very complex and lengthy disposal and building project. This would take many years to deliver and also require significant expertise. The availability and the sourcing of land in the locations required is also a significant unknown and risk to the delivery of such a project.
- 4.3.6 There is a significant risk with this option is that the Circuit would become consumed in an enormous building project and would have little energy to devote to the three aims that came out of the Circuit vision day.
- 4.3.7 Is using all of our assets for new builds an appropriate way to steward the Circuit's assets?

4.4 Consolidation

- 4.4.1 Consolidation would see the current 18 churches reduced to between 4 to 6 by 2030. The speed of such consolidation would depend on resource. Although, it has to be noted that the Circuits current finances, the condition of some of the buildings and the decline in attendance means that there is some urgency to commence if this is to be a managed process. It is extremely important that if this process is adopted it should be done in a planned and controlled way, rather than in a reactive and firefighting environment. It also needs to be done in a manner that enables the Circuit's 3 aims and models the Circuit's values. It therefore would need to involve appropriate consultation, openness and involvement.
- 4.4.2 Under this proposal agreement would have to be reached as to which buildings would no longer be used. All conversations at Circuit level and during the autumn Church conversations have recognised that this will not be easy, that this is an emotive issue. Whilst most consultees have recognised the need for change, it has been difficult to articulate how this might affect locations to which they are connected and invested.

4.4.3 One approach to overcome this is to adopt objective criteria to decide which building would be closed and in what order.

4.4.4 Standing Order 601 states:

‘(1) If a church is too small, by itself, to fulfil its functions it is encouraged to seek association with its neighbours for the discharge together of the things that cannot be attempted by one church alone.

(2) The minimum number of members for a self-governing church in the terms of Standing Orders 605 and 605A is set at a low figure to meet the need of sparsely populated areas; in general it is to be desired that much larger numbers be achieved.’^{xvi}

4.4.5 This would give credence to size being used as such objective criteria.

4.4.6 Similarly financial measures could be used, such as financial resilience as measured by church reserves.

4.4.7 The state of repair of buildings may also be considered and hence building resilience may become a deciding factor.

4.4.8 Indeed a raft of objective measures could be used, each of which are giving a weighting and then each location could be scored against this criteria. This would result in a suggested order of closure.

4.4.9 Agreement would also need to be reached as to what policy considerations might overall any such measuring process. For instance if the objective measures led to a perverse outcome in respect of geographical spread or resulted in a perverse impact in respect of significant missional work or objectives.

4.4.10 This option would enable the sale of those buildings closed which could then be invested in core sites and the building up of reserves. This should eliminate all building concerns, place the Circuit on a sound financial footing and provide for focus on mission.

4.4.11 Could this option facilitate the Circuits 3 aims and be undertaken in a way that models its values?

4.5 Close Down

4.5.1 This option would see the winding up of the Circuit and the closing down of all Churches. There are many Christian churches across the area served by the current circuit of Wolverhampton. These cover a wide spectrum of church

tradition and theological perspective. Against this backdrop and the backdrop of decline as expressed in this paper, has Methodism had its season in this area.

- 4.5.2 Alternatively, it can be argued that with over 1,000 members and in excess of 500 (How confident are we that this figure is anywhere near correct?) people in worship each Sunday, together with the finance and buildings that we do have, we are more than a 'going concern' and God is challenging the people called Methodists, to a new expression in Wolverhampton.
- 4.5.3 What is distinctive about what we are called to be as Methodists in the Wolverhampton Circuit?
- 4.5.4 This option would not promote the 3 aims of the Circuit.

4.6 A blended approach

- 4.6.1 This option recognises that there may be an approach to the future that blends 2 or more of the options discussed.
- 4.6.2 So for instance there may be a consolidation of buildings, but space may be provided through a hiring to enable worship or community mission to take place elsewhere. As with all options this would be dependent on staffing (ministerial and lay), finance and demand (primarily demonstrated by attendance). Such hiring could be in existing locations or new.
- 4.6.3 All of the options above could be blended, except for 'do nothing' and 'close down'.

Options for Governance/Decision-making

- 4.7 It is essential that the Circuit has a robust and well understood governance framework and a clear process for decision making. This is essential to ensure both compliance with Standing Orders and legal compliance. Yet it also needs to be recognised that reduced membership and resources make regulatory compliance more difficult and often appears burdensome.
- 4.8 In the *Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership* conference report of 2022, the Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt writes:

One of the current narratives in the Methodist Church is that people need to be 'freed' from their trustee responsibilities in order to be

authentic disciples. Yet exercising trusteeship is also a part of stewardship, and good governance is an aspect of mission and not just something that needs to be done in order to ensure compliance with charity (and other) law. Stewardship involves considering how the resources available are best used to enable and facilitate participation in mission (and resources include, for example, property, finance, time, and the gifts of individual members). Trusteeship is therefore an expression of discipleship rather than something that necessarily gets in the way of it, and it is important to consider questions of how people are being formed, supported and equipped for exercising such stewardship within trustee roles.^{xvii}

4.9 Recent changes in Standing Orders have made it possible for Circuits to change the shape and number of its governance bodies to make them more effective and efficient. These changes have been designed to enable Circuits to coordinate their mission with the minimum number of church governance bodies (including Church Councils) that it needs. One option this could result in is there being a single trustee body as the Circuit Meeting could also operate as a united Church Council. Another option is that a number of Church Councils would be in existence, each responsible for one or more places of worship. The approach to this taken by the Wolverhampton Circuit should be determined by taking into account all of the issues presented in this paper.

4.10 Indeed Conference has directed^{xviii}, to maximise the potential fruitfulness of all Circuits' use of their resources, that all Circuit Meetings review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and has encouraged Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling.

4.11 The 2021 Oversight and Trusteeship conference report identified two prevalent models that had emerged under the changes to Standing Orders. It also provided a useful example of how each had worked in practice:

A 'hub' or 'satellite' model is where one or more smaller congregations become a Class (or a small number of Classes) attached to a larger congregation, which will often then provide the bulk or occasionally all of the receiving Church Council. One creative example involved two small congregations becoming, in effect, satellites of a larger church. The first small congregation retained its rural chapel but resolved to merge with and become a Class of a larger church in a nearby town. Additionally, the larger church also took under its wing a second small rural congregation which, in that case, applied to cease to worship and to dispose of their chapel (delegating responsibility for this to the Circuit Leadership Team). This released any responsibility for further maintenance, and on disposal released significant funds for other work. The second congregation transferred

their membership to, and become another Class of, the larger Church, yet continued to meet separately on Sundays for worship through the Circuit Plan as a fellowship meeting in members' homes. Thus, two different routes led to two smaller congregations continuing their worship and identity (including retaining former names with minimal adaptations), with one retaining and the other leaving their chapels. In each case, the smaller congregation became a satellite of the receiving hub church, with trustee responsibilities taken up by the larger Church Council, to which representatives of the smaller congregations were invited. Some local church stewards and other officers continued in the smaller congregations, but responsibilities were now shared with the larger and more resourced congregation, who were willing to take on the smaller ones as part of their wider mission. Finance and assessments were worked out in a phased and fair way.

A 'sectional' or 'cluster' model is where two or more congregations merge to become a multi-site church, whether of similar small, or large, or varying, sizes, but with the intention of sharing responsibilities and mission together. It might be distinguished from the hub model perhaps because there are more similar sized congregations involved, but certainly there would be more evenness of contribution and endeavour (rather than relying more heavily on a single relatively larger congregation, as in the hub model). One received example involved all the former congregations of a small Circuit (covering a market town and various disparate villages) becoming a single church co-terminus with the Circuit, and making use of and operating according to Standing Order 511. The former congregations adopted a new common name, albeit often also described in connection with each particular location (i.e., '[name of the multi-site church] at [the particular location]'). On account of coming together, there was sufficient capacity and pooled resource for the new merged church to retain, for example, an otherwise redundant chapel and to use it for mission purposes; this might not otherwise have been possible. Subsequently, the small Circuit is now merging with another Circuit but retaining its sectional church arrangements, which will also be providing a template for the sections of the joining Circuit which will similarly be merged into multi-site churches, so as to streamline and facilitate the trusteeship and mission of the new Circuit as a whole.

4.12 The options for governance/decision-making are:

- Retain the current model of Church Councils by retaining one per Church and per location
- Reduce the number of Church Councils by bringing churches together to form a number of multi-site/presence churches

- To bring the Church Council and Circuit Meeting together as one trustee body by establishing the Circuit as a multi-site church.

Options for Ministry

4.13 The 1990 conference report, the Ministry of the People of God in the World, reminds us that:

Ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God Any reflection on ministry is therefore rooted in an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God as the primary and normative ministry of the Church. ^{xix}

4.14 Here, however, under options for ministry we are considering those that the Circuit appoints to undertake particular ministries that it has identified necessary for the achievement of its collective mission. This focuses on the presbyters, deacons and lay workers (both employed and volunteered) that are appointed by and to the Circuit.

4.15 For many years the norm has been for presbyters to have been deployed within Circuits by being identified with one or more Local Church(es). However different models of deployment have emerged with Circuits deploying presbyters, deacons and lay workers, for example according to particular gifts or with responsibility for a particular area (such as one of the four areas of Our Calling) or in respect of identified need (such as Youth work, Older Peoples ministry, Outreach, Chaplaincy etc.).

4.16 As far back as 2008, the Stationing Review Group recognised:

“As Circuits are increasingly working in a mixed economy of ministries – ordained presbyters and deacons in roles within and outside the Church, full-time or part-time, lay people employed as well as in formal voluntary posts and faithful members holding office – there is an urgent need to develop collaborative partnership ways of working of a professional standard.”^{xx}

4.17 The different make up and ways in which staff at Circuit level are deployed, together with the reduction in the number of Presbyters has prompted some concerns and lack of clarity about pastoral charge.

4.18 Standing Order 700(7) states:

Pastoral charge in a Circuit is exercised by those presbyters in the active work who are appointed by the Conference to that Circuit;

sharing with others, in the courts of the church and individually, the exercise of the particular responsibilities and ministries involved, they have oversight on behalf of the Conference of the worship, pastoral care and mission policy of the Circuit and its constituent Local Churches in accordance with Methodist discipline.

4.19 Pastoral charge in a Circuit is therefore something that is always shared.

4.20 So the options for Ministry in the Circuit are:

- Appointment of Presbyters identified with one or more churches
- Appointment of a range of individuals (Presbyteral, Diaconal and Lay) to minister to identified needs of the Circuit
- Appoint individuals to meet the needs of an individual church or churches
- Appoint individuals to work collectively to meet the identified missional needs of the Circuit
- A blended approach which sees appropriate Ministerial and Office holders appointed across the Circuit.

4.21 As the Circuit seeks to adapt to new contexts it needs to be alive to the need of new and emerging ministries that God may be calling us to equip.

Section 5 Preferred Option

- 5.1 A blended approach is the preferred option. A consolidation of the number of churches bringing congregations together. The Circuit will maintain a number of its current buildings and in time will also have hired space to maintain ministry in a location or to go where the people are for new ministry.
- 5.2 There should be a phased approach to consolidating our current churches moving from the current 18 church buildings to between 8 to 10. The aim would be to release people where buildings have become a burden. There should be a further review in 5 years.
- 5.3 There should be a programme of change that draws congregations together. The 8 to 10 churches should be brought together into 4 clusters. The aim to establish clusters that are well resourced, enabled and confident.
- 5.4 As churches come together there should be an ambition to reduce the number of meetings and the burden of governance as far as possible whilst still fully complying with charity trustee requirements and Methodist Standing Orders.
- 5.5 Each of the clusters would become one church over a number of locations. Hence each cluster would become one Trustee body and one church council.
- 5.6 Over time an option could be for the Circuit to become one Church in many locations. Hence there would be one Trustee Body for the Churches and the Circuit, one church council for the Circuit and one Circuit Meeting, which would become one meeting.
- 5.7 Ministry should be delivered on a Team basis across the whole of the Circuit. Individual skills and gifts among members of the staff team should be used as a resource for the whole Circuit. There should be flexibility in the make-up of the Ministry Team between Presbyters, Deacons, lay (employed and voluntary) dependant on identified need and resource. There may be a Biblical model of what the roles might be – apostle, pastor, prophet, etc. However, it is essential that the roles are defined to respond to the identified ministry needs of the Circuit at the point of appointment.
- 5.8 It is essential, however, that as the move to Team Ministry takes place, there is retained clarity as to pastoral responsibility. Each member should retain clarity as to who is responsible for their pastoral care. Consideration should be given to the appointment of local pastors to each location where Circuit activity takes place. It is also essential to recognise that the nature and ministry of each cluster may be very different and this would need to be provided for in the move to Team Ministry.

5.9 It is recommended as essential that there should be appointed a lay operations manager for the Circuit who would work in partnership with the Superintendent and who would become a key member of the CLT. This role would free up the Superintendent and the other employed ministers to focus on ministry.

5.10A detailed implementation plan will need to be work up to put into place any proposed change. This will include a specific plan to pastorally support all through this significant transition.

Section 6 Digital Church

6.1 The Covid pandemic and its resultant lockdowns saw a period of closure of all of the buildings across the Circuit. It also resulted in a long period of public health constraints on how we could come together to worship. The response to this was the rapid emergence and implementation of many alternative creative means by which congregations were enabled to keep connected and that the mission to the wider community could keep going.

6.2 One of the most significant impacts was a significant acceleration in the investment in digital infra-structure, together with a rapid adoption and education in the use of digital communication platforms. As a result, a number of the Circuits churches now have the ability:

- to live stream services to remote and dispersed audiences
- to digitally record services and post them on various video hosting platforms
- to enable participants in other locations to make a live contribution to services, i.e. preachers from a significant distance not having to travel
- to enable family members from other parts of the world to connect with significant occasions, such as funerals, christenings, Christmas midnight communion
- to enhance worship by the use of scenes to show digital content or link a number of worship venues.

6.3 Over the lockdown period many of us learnt how to use the mute button and adapted to on-line etiquette. Meetings were enabled without the need for us to move from our homes. Prayer groups and small house groups met using computers, laptops, smart phones and telephones.

6.4 Over this period there was much debate about the digitally excluded and how we keep them engaged. However, over this period there was also an awakening to those we had been excluding when our buildings were open and how digital tools could engage many to whom our buildings were inaccessible or were a barrier. There was significant discussion about how this could lead to a new form of church and debate about how and what 'hybrid church' could be in the new norm of a post Covid world. Interestingly, since lockdown has been lifted and our buildings have reopened, the urgency of this debate has dissipated.

6.5 There has been a shift in practice. Meetings continue to take place on-line where appropriate. Groups continue to meet for prayer using digital platforms. Such groups not existing before lockdown and prayer meetings in many places

previously struggled for attendance when this required travel and physical attendance. Small groups still regularly meet using digital platforms also.

- 6.6 This phenomena is not something new, but maybe something that the pandemic has prompted the Circuit to catch up with. Peter Ward in 2013 in his book *Liquid Church*^{xxi}, among others, taught that Church does not just mean coming together in physical church buildings but also in networked, online, liquid expression of Church. Institutions like the Centre for Digital Theology, formerly CODEC, has been working at Durham University for the last decade seeking to raise awareness of the need for the Church to take digital seriously.
- 6.7 The question is whether the Circuit has gone far enough and whether in terms of mission this is a place God may be calling us to. The Rev Dr Peter Phillips in *'Wesley's parish and the digital age?'*^{xxii} offers a fresh approach to Methodist identity magnified by aspects of digital culture, calling for the creation of digital Arminianism, digital field preaching, digital creativity and, ultimately, a digital parish. The article proposes that Methodism embrace a digital social holiness to spread scriptural holiness throughout the geographic and digital landscape.
- 6.8 What has become apparent is that if we are committed to be truly accessible, we need to recognise that online church has been long awaited for many in the disabled, health-challenged or housebound communities, who have been socially distanced from Church for too long.
- 6.9 There is much discussion about the need to engage with young people and young families. Can we be serious in such a discussion or any ambition in this space if we are not to engage with digital culture. Digital culture and its influence is pervasive across the Global North and South and not just among the young.
- 6.10 Despite the Circuits progress in the digital space, it is recognised that the use of social media is patchy at best. For many social media is now their prime method of communication and information. If the Circuit is not communicating effectively in this space, it is now not surprising that our communities are not aware of what we are doing.
- 6.11 In light of all this it is recommended that as part of this review of the future of the Circuit, that the Circuit seeks to build upon and consolidate its use of digital and continue to seek what God is calling us to be in the on-line space. It is also recommended that resource be found to develop and co-ordinate the Circuits use of social media as a communication and information giving platform.

Section 7 Numbers

7.1 Finance

7.1.1 Budget 2023

Stipends will increase by around 7.5%

District Assessment by around 5 to 6%

Other costs are likely to increase by 5 to 6%

7.1.1.1 These increases will see a deficit in the region of £55,000 to £60,000 in 2023 which, unless churches increase giving, will have to come from reserves (i.e. Methodist Trust Fund)

7.1.2 Circuit Finances Year ending 31st August 2022

General Fund: Deficit £ 112,000
(Budget was deficit £26,000)

Methodist Trust Fund (MTF) Balance £325,000 Surplus £20,000
(deficits being funded from this)

Other Funds Deficit £3,000 (mainly restricted)

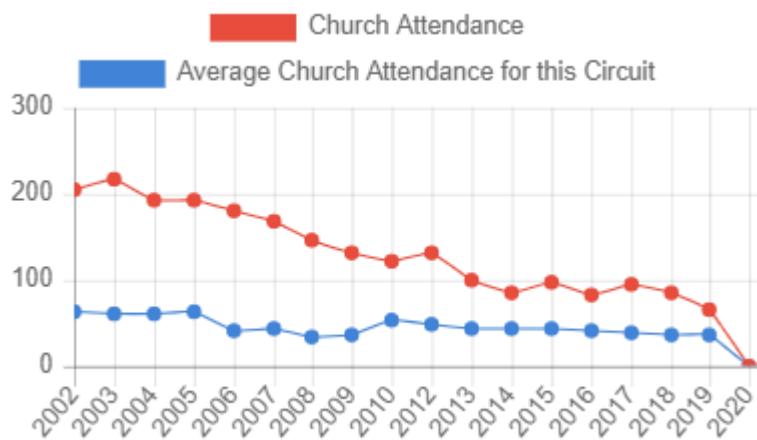
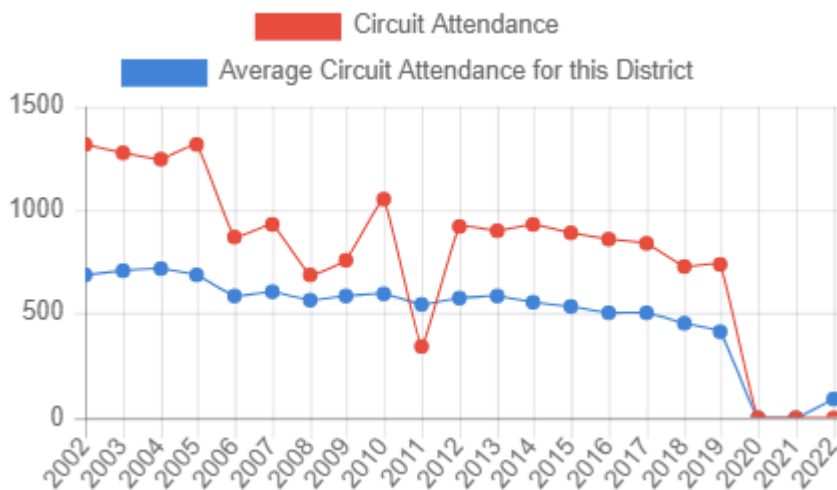
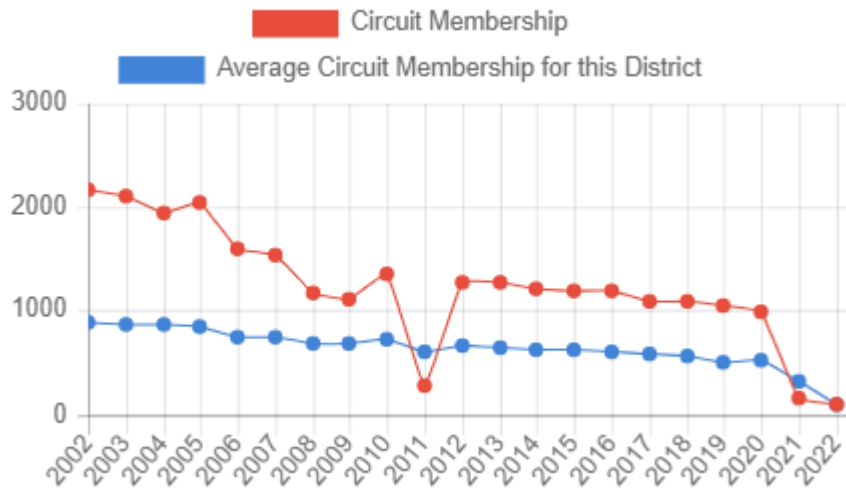
7.1.3 Previous years Circuit Finances

Year-end	Income	Expenditure	Balance
2018	£540,787.00	£601,599.00	-£ 60,812.00
2019	£512,993.00	£583,584.00	-£ 70,591.00
2020	£545,399.00	£596,033.00	-£ 50,634.00
2021	£476,169.00	£621,639.00	-£145,470.00

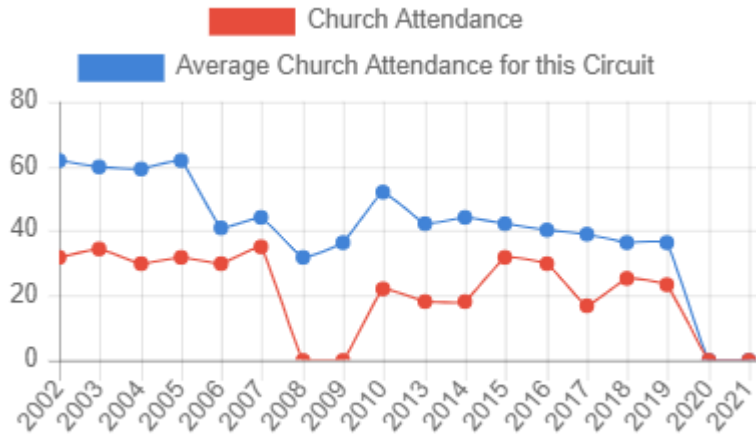
7.1.4 CHURCHES - FINANCE SUMMARY FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST AUGUST 2021,
2022, YEAR ASSESSMENT AND PLEDGE FOR 2021/22 FINANCIAL YEAR

CHURCH	INCOME (£)	EXPENSES (£)	UNRESTRICTED RESERVES (£)	Assessment 2021/22(£)	Pledge for 2022/23(£)
Beckminster	113340	107163	53245	61038	57376
Bilston	33653	40777	33401	8400	8770
Bradley	17344	13101	31416	8648	9029
Brewood	11545	10349	51822	6112	6380
Codsall	136316	86318	99660	55000	45000
Cranmer	0	0		8000	8352
Coven	5136	6246	53638	3720	3884
East Park	17863	14977	13913	6000	6264
Fallings Park	0	0		27000	28188
Hurst Hill	17178	21150	35590	7179	7485
Lanesfield	36210	32846	38775	15400	16078
Rakegate	4091	2758	3029	3031	3164
Springdale	50072	52087	37807	42616	44491
St Andrews	81289	82138	99917	38000	39672
St Johns	101883	183499	114129	34048	35546
Stratton Street	15025	10330	14447	9146	9548
Upper Ettingshall	12370	26769	8181	2130	2224
Wombourne	48129	40929	24584	27000	28188
				362468	359639

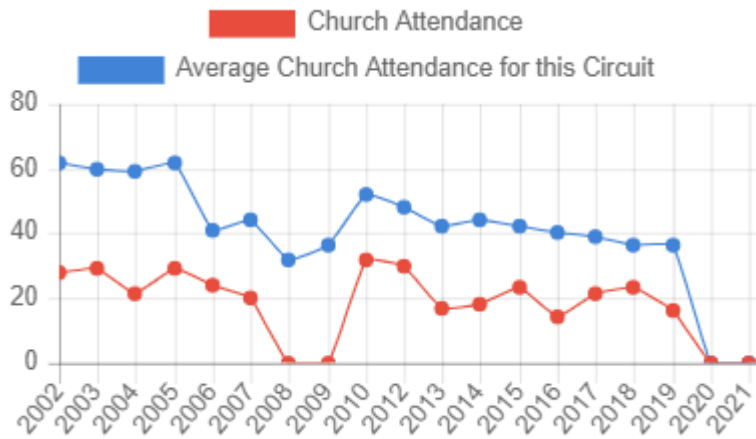
7.2 Members/Attendance



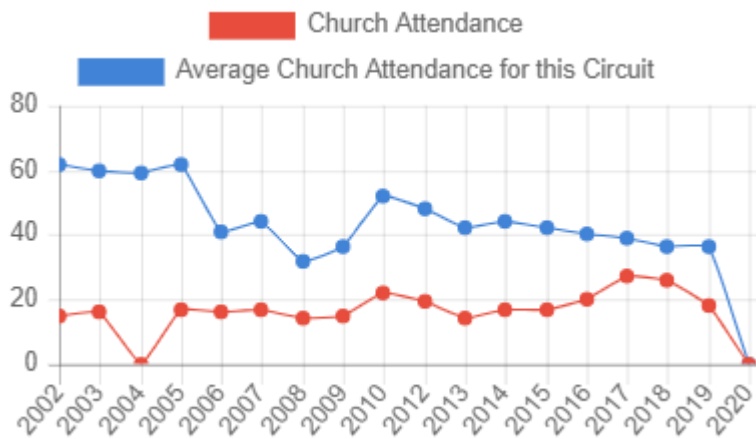
Beckminster



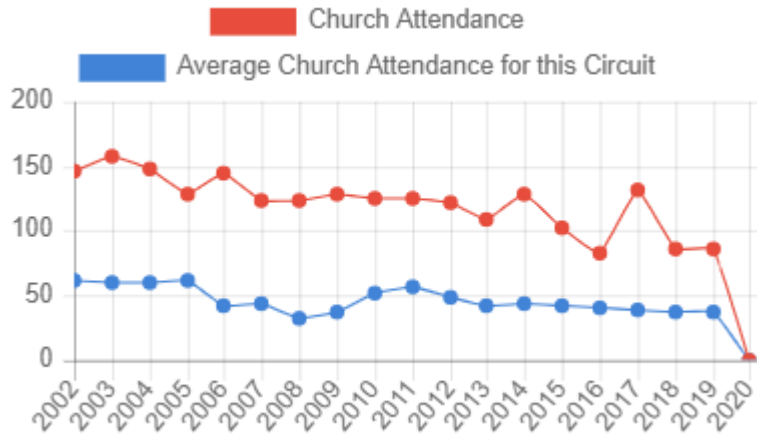
Bilston



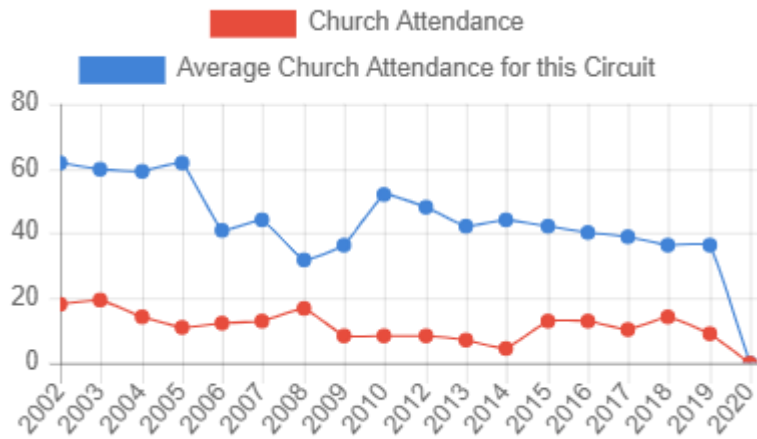
Bradley



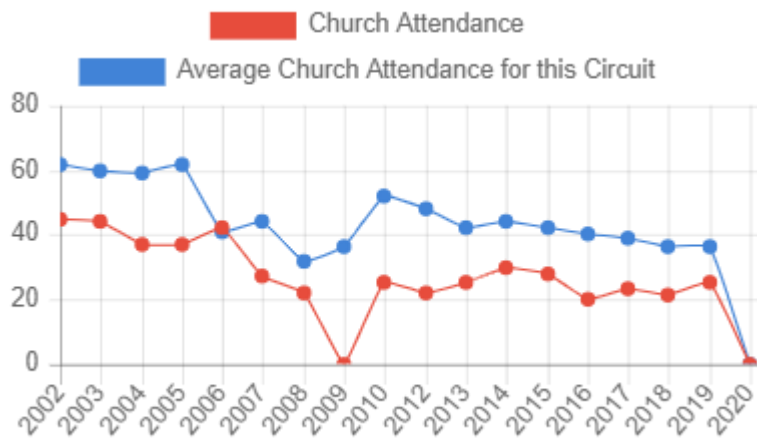
Brewood



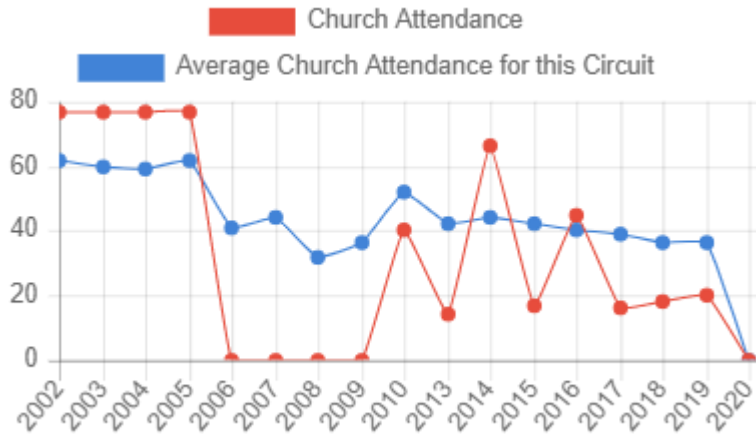
Codsall



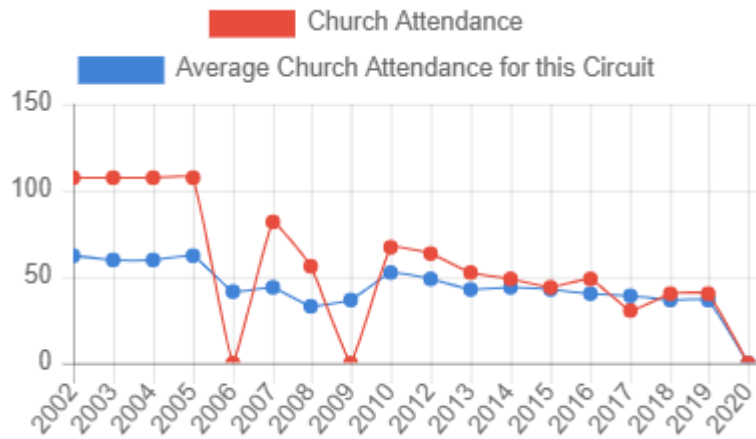
Coven



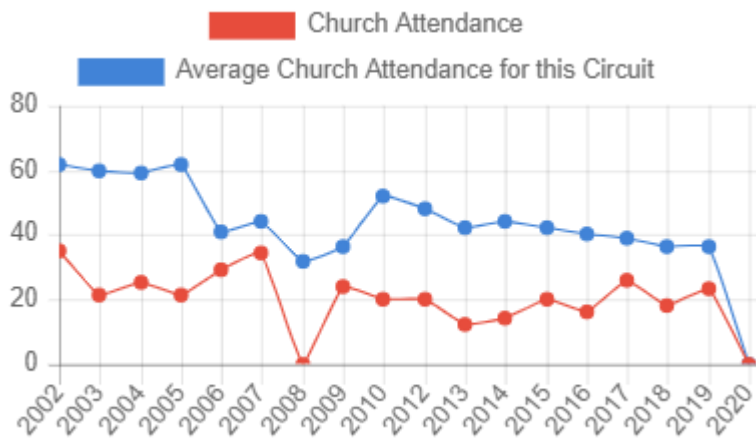
Cranmer



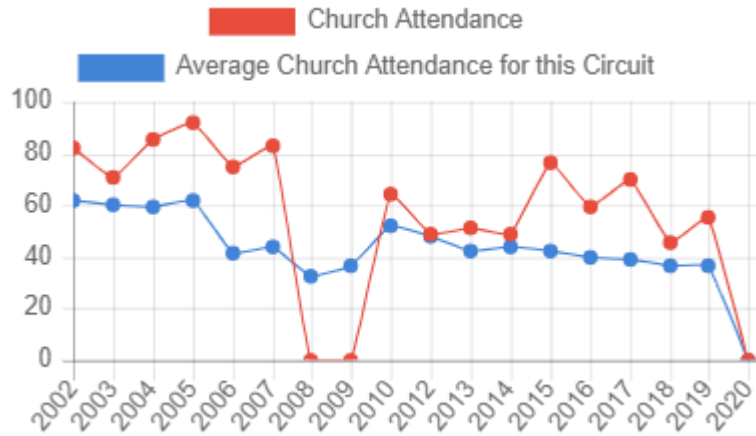
East Park



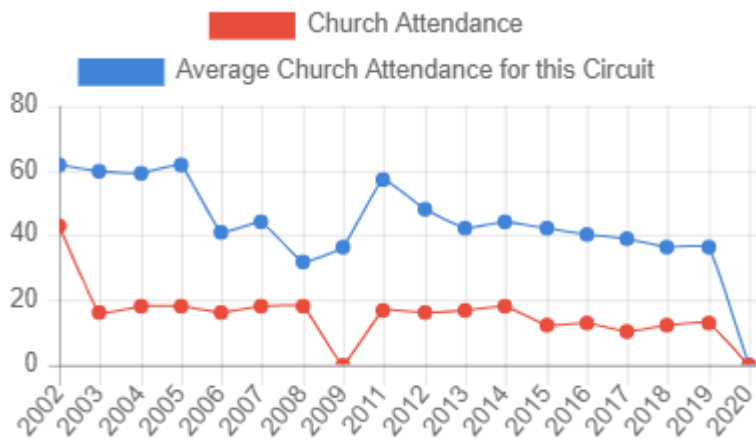
Fallings Park



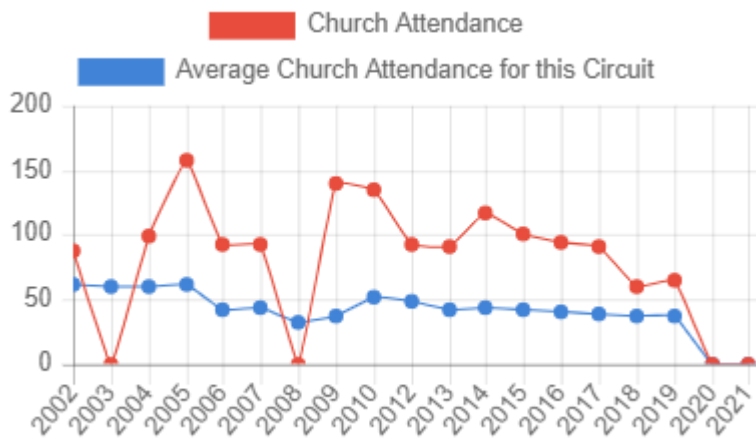
Hurst Hill



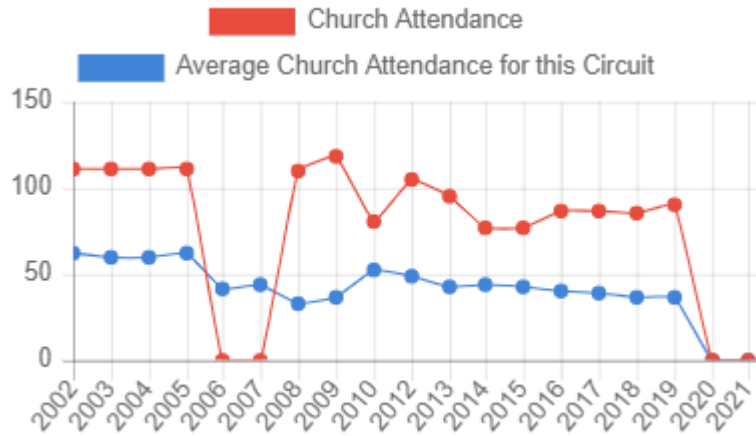
Lanesfield



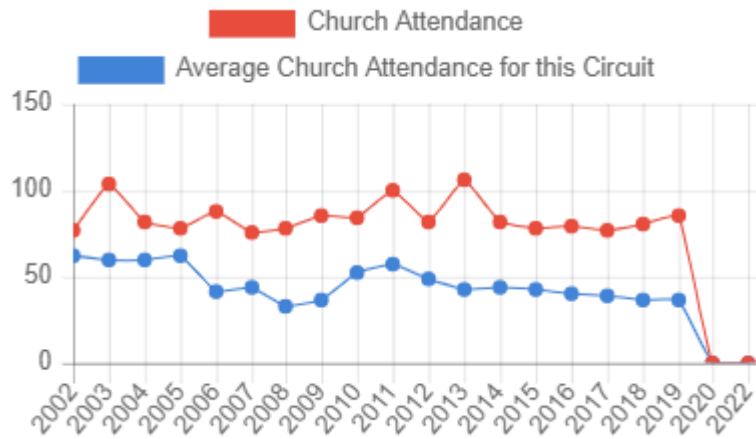
Rakegate



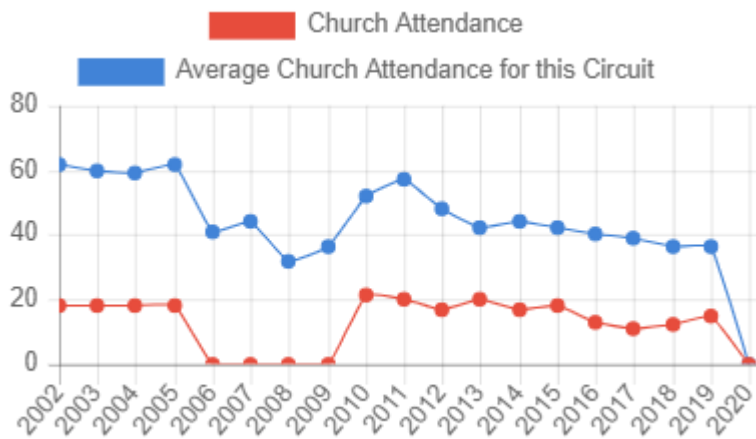
St Andrews



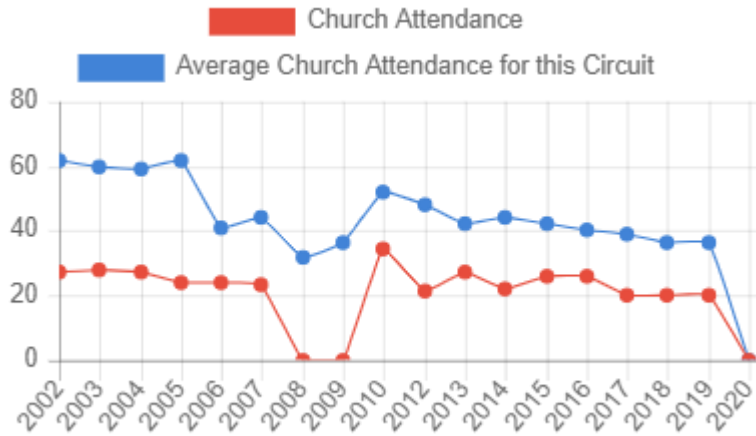
St Johns



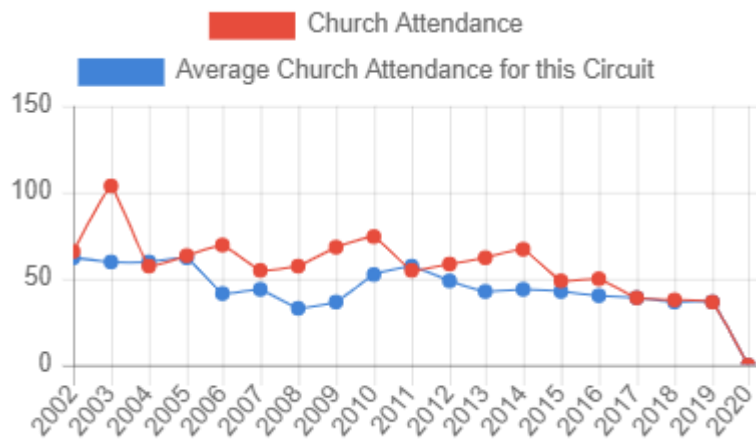
Springdale



Stratton Street



Upper Ettingshall



Wombourne

7.3 Distance

Miles by car	Beckminster	Bilston	Bradley	Brewood	Codsall	Coven	Cranmer	East Park	Fallings Park	Hurst Hill	Lanesfield	Rakegate	St Andrews	St Johns	Springdale	Stratton Street	Upper Ettingshall	Wombourne
Beckminster		3.7	4.1	9.1	5.1	6.7	2.7	2.8	3.4	3.0	2.2	4.4	3.0	1.2	1.5	2.7	3.4	4.3
Bilston	3.7		1.8	10.3	7.7	7.9	4.2	2.3	3.4	2.6	2.6	5.7	3.4	2.5	4.9	3.5	2.6	7.3
Bradley	4.1	1.8		11.4	8.8	9.0	5.3	3.6	4.9	1.7	2.3	6.8	2.5	3.0	5.4	4.9	1.7	6.4
Brewood	9.1	10.3	11.4		4.0	2.4	6.9	8.4	7.0	11.2	10.1	6.1	11.1	9.3	9.4	7.5	11.2	12.4
Codsall	5.1	7.7	8.8	4.0		4.1	3.3	6.6	5.5	8.1	7.0	3.2	8.0	6.2	5.5	5.6	8.1	8.4
Coven	6.7	7.9	9.0	2.4	4.1		5.3	6.1	4.6	8.8	7.7	3.8	8.7	6.9	7.9	5.2	8.8	10.6
Cranmer	2.7	4.2	5.3	6.9	3.3	5.3		3.1	2.7	4.9	3.8	2.0	4.8	3.0	3.1	2.1	4.9	6.3
East Park	2.8	2.3	3.6	8.4	6.6	6.1	3.1		1.6	3.6	3.0	4.3	4.3	2.4	4.3	1.7	3.6	6.9
Fallings Park	3.4	3.4	4.9	7.0	5.5	4.6	2.7	1.6		4.7	4.1	3.0	5.2	3.4	4.4	0.9	4.7	7.3
Hurst Hill	3.0	2.6	1.7	11.2	8.1	8.8	4.9	3.6	4.7		1.2	6.6	0.8	2.0	4.3	4.7	0.4	4.7
Lanesfield	2.2	2.6	2.3	10.1	7.0	7.7	3.8	3.0	4.1	1.2		5.5	1.4	1.1	3.5	3.5	1.3	5.5
Rakegate	4.4	5.7	6.8	6.1	3.2	3.8	2.0	4.3	3.0	6.6	5.5		6.5	4.7	4.8	3.2	6.6	7.7
St Andrews	3.0	3.4	2.5	11.1	8.0	8.7	4.8	4.3	5.2	0.8	1.4	6.5		2.0	4.1	4.9	1.2	3.9
St Johns	1.2	2.5	3.0	9.3	6.2	6.9	3.0	2.4	3.4	2.0	1.1	4.7	2.0		2.5	3.0	2.2	5.0
Springdale	1.5	4.9	5.4	9.4	5.5	7.9	3.1	4.3	4.4	4.3	3.5	4.8	4.1	2.5		3.8	4.6	2.9
Stratton Street	2.7	3.5	4.9	7.5	5.6	5.2	2.1	1.7	0.9	4.7	3.5	3.2	4.9	3.0	3.8		4.6	6.7
Upper Ettingshall	3.4	2.6	1.7	11.2	8.1	8.8	4.9	3.6	4.7	0.4	1.3	6.6	1.2	2.2	4.6	4.6		5.1
Wombourne	4.3	7.3	6.4	12.4	8.4	10.6	6.3	6.9	7.3	4.7	5.5	7.7	3.9	5.0	2.9	6.7	5.1	

Time by car (minutes)	Beckminster	Bilston	Bradley	Brewood	Codsall	Coven	Cranmer	East Park	Fallings Park	Hurst Hill	Lanesfield	Rakegate	St Andrews	St Johns	Springdale	Stratton Street	Upper Ettingshall	Wombourne
Beckminster		13	14	22	14	21	8	10	14	9	7	16	9	5	5	12	11	11
Bilston	13		7	28	24	23	16	9	14	9	9	22	11	11	18	15	9	21
Bradley	14	7		28	27	23	19	12	18	6	8	25	8	11	17	19	6	18
Brewood	22	28	28		8	6	16	25	18	30	29	14	33	28	23	20	30	29
Codsall	14	24	27	8		9	9	22	17	24	22	10	24	20	14	18	25	21
Coven	21	23	23	6	9		15	22	14	29	28	10	31	29	25	17	29	35
Cranmer	8	16	19	16	9	15		15	9	15	12	7	15	11	9	7	15	15
East Park	10	9	12	25	22	22	15		5	11	9	12	12	8	12	6	11	18
Fallings Park	14	14	18	18	17	14	9	5		16	14	10	17	14	15	4	16	22
Hurst Hill	9	9	6	30	24	29	15	11	16		3	19	2	6	10	15	1	11
Lanesfield	7	9	8	29	22	28	12	9	14	3		16	4	4	10	11	4	13
Rakegate	16	22	25	14	10	10	7	12	10	19	16		17	13	14	9	17	20
St Andrews	9	11	8	33	24	31	15	12	17	2	4	17		5	8	12	3	9
St Johns	5	11	11	28	20	29	11	8	14	6	4	13	5		7	9	6	11
Springdale	5	18	17	23	14	25	9	12	15	10	10	14	8	7		10	11	6
Stratton Street	12	15	19	20	18	17	7	6	4	15	11	9	12	9	10		13	16
Upper Ettingshall	11	9	6	30	25	29	15	11	16	1	4	17	3	6	11	13		11
Wombourne	11	21	18	29	21	35	15	18	22	11	13	20	9	11	6	16	11	

Time Walking (Minutes)	Beckminster	Bilston	Bradley	Brewood	Codsall	Coven	Cranmer	East Park	Fallings Park	Hurst Hill	Lanesfield	Rakegate	St Andrews	St Johns	Springdale	Stratton Street	Upper Ettingshall	Wombourne
Beckminster		69	80	164	102	135	41	55	65	59	43	82	52	24	30	51	66	89
Bilston	69		26	204	146	156	85	43	69	43	44	112	58	44	93	71	42	141
Bradley	80	26		223	164	180	104	62	91	34	43	131	49	57	106	92	29	130
Brewood	164	204	223		77	49	125	163	134	214	194	110	210	176	142	216	226	
Codsall	102	146	164	77		82	64	117	103	150	132	62	148	115	107	92	155	150
Coven	135	156	180	49	82		101	115	87	169	150	75	168	134	153	95	173	209
Cranmer	41	85	104	125	64	101		57	49	89	71	40	88	54	56	32	94	116
East Park	55	43	62	163	117	115	57		30	62	53	82	71	41	85	32	64	137
Fallings Park	65	69	91	134	103	87	49	30		91	78	57	98	65	88	19	93	148
Hurst Hill	59	43	34	214	150	169	89	62	91		24	127	15	41	83	88	7	98
Lanesfield	43	44	43	194	132	150	71	53	78	24		105	25	21	66	67	25	108
Rakegate	82	112	131	110	62	75	40	82	57	127	105		118	85	93	49	123	146
St Andrews	52	58	49	210	148	168	88	71	98	15	25	118		42	68	91	25	82
St Johns	24	44	57	176	115	134	54	41	65	41	21	85	42		51	53	43	103
Springdale	30	93	106	176	107	153	56	85	88	83	66	93	68	51		73	86	59
Stratton Street	51	71	92	142	92	95	32	32	19	88	67	49	91	53	73		85	132
Upper Ettingshall	66	42	29	216	155	173	94	64	93	7	25	123	25	43	86	85		104
Wombourne	89	141	130	226	150	209	116	137	148	98	108	146	82	103	59	132	104	

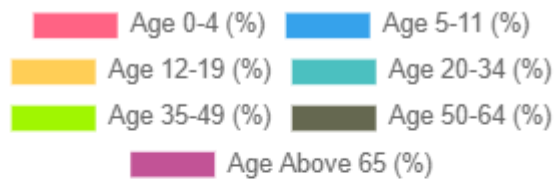
Time by public transport (Minutes)	Beckminster	Bilston	Bradley	Brewood	Codsall	Coven	Cranmer	East Park	Fallings Park	Hurst Hill	Lanesfield	Rakegate	St Andrews	St Johns	Springdale	Stratton Street	Upper Ettingshall	Wombourne
Beckminster		32	47	NP	NP	NP	30	31	29	40	30	42	35	30	18	20	39	25
Bilston	32		13	NP	NP	NP	41	27	35	46	26	51	39	12	54	31	45	NP
Bradley	47	13		NP	NP	NP	48	44	56	NP	63	NP	69	65	61	52	NP	NP
Brewood	NP	NP	NP		NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Codsall	NP	NP	NP	NP		NP	NP	NP	73	52	43	NP	NP	44	NP	65	45	NP
Coven	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP		NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Cranmer	30	41	48	NP	NP	NP		38	27	35	31	23	34	28	40	23	36	NP
East Park	31	27	56	NP	NP	NP	38		28	57	15	48	48	42	45	24	56	NP
Fallings Park	29	35	56	NP	73	NP	27	28		54	44	45	45	39	42	13	53	NP
Hurst Hill	40	46	NP	NP	52	NP	35	57	54		4	41	NP	9	58	17	NP	NP
Lanesfield	30	26	63	NP	43	NP	31	15	44	4		38	21	11	55	14	13	NP
Rakegate	42	51	NP	NP	NP	NP	23	48	45	41	38		45	42	41	27	37	NP
St Andrews	35	39	69	NP	NP	NP	34	48	45	NP	21	45		11	55	28	23	NP
St Johns	30	12	65	NP	44	NP	28	42	39	9	11	42	11		46	20	20	NP
Springdale	18	54	61	NP	NP	NP	40	45	42	58	55	41	55	46		37	49	17
Stratton Street	20	31	52	NP	65	NP	23	24	13	17	14	27	28	20	37		48	NP
Upper Ettingshall	39	45	NP	NP	45	NP	36	56	53	NP	13	37	23	20	49	48		NP
Wombourne	25	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	17	NP	NP	

*NP means 'not possible' or 'not practical' on a Sunday morning because not available, length of travel time, length of walking or the distance between chapels is too short.

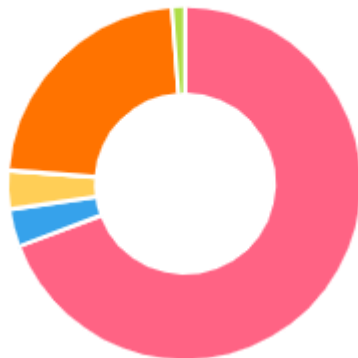
In terms of distance it is useful to look at what is just beyond the Circuit boundary:

- Albrighton, Telford Circuit
4.1 miles from Codsall
- Penkridge, Cannock Chase Circuit
5 miles from Brewood
- Featherstone, Cannock Chase Circuit
3.3 miles from Coven
- Short Heath, Brownhills & Willenhall Circuit
3.7 miles from Fallings Park
- Portobello, Brownhills & Willenhall Circuit
1.6 miles from East Park
- Roseville, Black Country Circuit
1.1 miles from Upper Ettingshall
- Upper Gornal, Gornal & Sedgley Circuit
1.2 miles from St. Andrews
- Kingswinford, Vale of Stour Circuit
3.1 miles from Wombourne

7.4 Demographics



Circuit population by age



Circuit population by religion

7.5 Assets

7.5.1 Churches

- 7.5.1.1 18 churches (The value of these assets are currently subject to a desktop valuation exercise).

7.5.2 Disposals

- 7.5.2.1 **Darlington Street** £302,000 expected to be transferred from District to Circuit MTF

- 7.5.2.2 Fordhouses

- 7.5.2.3 Stowlawn
- 7.5.2.4 Wednesfield
- 7.5.2.5 Lewis Street Manse

7.5.3 Manses

- 7.5.3.1 Bellencroft Gardens
- 7.5.3.2 Histons Hill
- 7.5.3.3 Tudor Crescent
- 7.5.3.4 Wimborne Road – currently rented out.

7.6 Capacity

Church	Seating	Car Park
Beckminster		
Bilston		25 spaces
Bradley	60 chapel	8 spaces
Brewood	80 chapel, 30 small hall	1 space
Codsall		
Coven	60 chapel	none
Cranmer		
East Park	150 chapel, 150 annex	25 spaces
Fallings Park	180 chapel, 200 hall, 25 primary room, 15 prayer room, 30 the hut	30 spaces
Hurst Hill		
Lanesfield	150 chapel	15 spaces
Rakegate		
Church	Seating	Car Park

St. Andrews	180 chapel, 25 café, 30 Wesley room, 15 prayer room, 20 lounge, 8 shop, 50 Livingstone, 40 room 3	45 spaces
St. Johns		
Springdale	120 chapel + 15 nursery chairs, 30 old stage, 30 atrium	25 spaces
Stratton Street	80 chapel	none
Upper Ettingshall		
Wombourne	101 chapel, 32 annex, 77 school room	none

7.7 Staff

Presbyteral & Diaconate

- 7.7.1.1 Joanne Cox-Darling - stationed until August 2025.
- 7.7.1.2 Sam Hagerman - stationed until August 2025.
- 7.7.1.3 Teddy Siwila - Stationed until August 2026.
- 7.7.1.4 Linda Gilson - stationed until August 2026.
- 7.7.1.5 Steve Jackson - stationed until August 2026.
- 7.7.1.6 Paul Nzacahayo - stationed until August 2027.
- 7.7.1.7 Rosemary Nash - stationed until August 2027.

Decision to reduce ministerial staff by 1 in 2025.

Lay – The Circuit has a number of lay employees.

7.8 Population attitude to the Bible^{xxiii}

South Staffordshire's persona breakdown

	South Staffordshire		National
Bible Loving	3.19%	▼ -1.42%	4.61%
Bible Infrequent	8.06%	▼ -0.24%	8.30%
Bible Conflicted	3.99%	▼ -1.28%	5.27%
Bible Uncertain	7.22%	▲ +0.52%	6.70%
Bible Nostalgic	9.76%	▲ +1.68%	8.08%
Bible Cultural	18.46%	▲ +5.33%	13.13%
Bible Indifferent	23.16%	▲ +0.60%	22.56%
Bible Dismissive	26.17%	▼ -5.18%	31.35%

Apart from weddings, baptisms, christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Daily/almost daily	0.20%
A few times a week	0.97%
About once a week	3.10%
About once a fortnight	0.92%
About once a month	0.93%
A few times a year	8.29%
About once a year	8.04%
Hardly ever	16.50%
Never	61.06%

Wolverhampton North East's persona breakdown

	Wolverhampton North East		National
Bible Loving	2.75%	▼ -1.86%	4.61%
Bible Infrequent	5.74%	▼ -2.56%	8.30%
Bible Conflicted	5.10%	▼ -0.17%	5.27%
Bible Uncertain	9.44%	▲ +2.74%	6.70%
Bible Nostalgic	6.14%	▼ -1.94%	8.08%
Bible Cultural	12.01%	▼ -1.12%	13.13%
Bible Indifferent	27.77%	▲ +5.21%	22.56%
Bible Dismissive	31.06%	▼ -0.29%	31.35%

Apart from weddings, baptisms, christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Daily/almost daily	0.13%
A few times a week	0.93%
About once a week	2.20%
About once a fortnight	0.65%
About once a month	0.71%
A few times a year	6.35%
About once a year	4.97%
Hardly ever	14.35%
Never	69.72%

Wolverhampton South West's persona breakdown

	Wolverhampton South West		National
Bible Loving	3.36%	▼ -1.25%	4.61%
Bible Infrequent	6.62%	▼ -1.68%	8.30%
Bible Conflicted	7.97%	▲ +2.70%	5.27%
Bible Uncertain	9.11%	▲ +2.41%	6.70%
Bible Nostalgic	6.59%	▼ -1.49%	8.08%
Bible Cultural	10.93%	▼ -2.20%	13.13%
Bible Indifferent	27.52%	▲ +4.96%	22.56%
Bible Dismissive	27.90%	▼ -3.45%	31.35%

Apart from weddings, baptisms, christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Daily/almost daily	0.27%
A few times a week	1.20%
About once a week	2.73%
About once a fortnight	1.41%
About once a month	1.30%
A few times a year	8.01%
About once a year	5.77%
Hardly ever	14.50%
Never	64.80%

Wolverhampton South East's persona breakdown

	Wolverhampton South East		National
Bible Loving	2.52%	▼ -2.09%	4.61%
Bible Infrequent	5.36%	▼ -2.94%	8.30%
Bible Conflicted	7.49%	▲ +2.22%	5.27%
Bible Uncertain	12.24%	▲ +5.54%	6.70%
Bible Nostalgic	4.31%	▼ -3.77%	8.08%
Bible Cultural	10.13%	▼ -3.00%	13.13%
Bible Indifferent	31.90%	▲ +9.34%	22.56%
Bible Dismissive	26.05%	▼ -5.30%	31.35%

Apart from weddings, baptisms, christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Daily/almost daily	0.27%
A few times a week	1.00%
About once a week	1.89%
About once a fortnight	1.10%
About once a month	1.32%
A few times a year	7.36%
About once a year	3.76%
Hardly ever	14.06%
Never	69.25%

Section 8 Methodist Structure

8.1 If you are a member of your Local Church Council, Circuit Meeting or any of the other Methodist bodies of Managing Trustees, then you are a charity trustee. This means that there are a number of duties placed on you under charity law. In England and Wales, the key piece of legislation is the Charities Act 2011.

8.2 Standing Order 500 - Nature and Purposes of the Circuit

(1) The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help. It is in the Circuit that presbyters, deacons and probationers are stationed and local preachers are trained and admitted and exercise their calling. The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit, to churches of other denominations and to participation in the life of the communities served by the Circuit, including local schools and colleges, and in ecumenical work in the area including, where appropriate, the support of ecumenical Housing Associations.

8.3 Standing Order 515 – Responsibilities of the Circuit Meeting

(1) The Circuit Meeting is the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of the Circuit and the development of circuit policy. It shall exercise that combination of spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency which will enable the Circuit to fulfil its purposes as set out in Standing Order 500, and shall act as the focal point of the working fellowship of the churches in the Circuit, overseeing their pastoral, training and evangelistic work.

8.4 Standing Order 601 – A Church's Size.

(1) If a church is too small, by itself, to fulfil its functions it is encouraged to seek association with its neighbours for the discharge together of the things that cannot be attempted by one church alone.

(2) The minimum number of members for a self-governing church in the terms of Standing Orders 605 and 605A is set at a low figure to meet the need of sparsely populated areas; in general it is to be desired that much larger numbers be achieved.

8.5 Standing Order 605 – A Church's Formation

(1) No new Local Church shall be formed, nor former church reconstituted, having less than twelve persons who are locally resident and will either be members of that church or be actively committed to its life as ministers not in the active work. Any such person who is not a minister must be a member of an existing Local Church or in another Methodist Connexion, or must be a candidate for membership who has successfully completed training.

(2) [deleted]

(3) For the purpose of clause (1) and of Standing Order 605A(1) a person is locally resident if resident in such a place that the Local Church in question is a natural centre for worship or fellowship.

8.6 Standing Order 605A - A Church's Cessation and Merger

(1) When, in any Local Church, the number of locally resident persons who are members or are actively committed to its life as ministers not in the active work falls below twelve, and so continues for four successive quarters, that church shall cease to be entitled to be recognised as a Local Church and the Circuit Meeting shall at its next meeting close it and transfer any remaining members to another designated Local Church in that or (by agreement with the other Circuit Meeting) another Circuit.

(2) Whether or not clause (1) above would or might otherwise apply any Local Church may, under a scheme agreed between its Church Council, the Church Councils of any other Local Churches involved and their Circuit Meeting or Circuit Meetings, merge with one or more other Local Churches to form a single Local Church consisting of all the members of the constituent former churches. Such a scheme shall come into effect when adopted by resolutions of all those bodies.

For closure of chapels see S.O. 943. The reference to 'remaining' members recognises that when cessation under this provision is imminent some members may choose to be transferred to a Local Church other than that designated. See also S.O. 612. (2) Whether or not clause (1) above would or might otherwise apply any Local Church may, under a scheme agreed between its Church Council, the Church Councils of any other Local Churches involved and their Circuit Meeting or Circuit Meetings, merge with one or more other Local Churches to form a single Local Church consisting of all the members of the constituent former churches. Such a scheme shall come into effect when adopted by resolutions of all those bodies.

8.7 Standing Order 942 - Local Churches and Chapels

(1) There may be more than one chapel used by or in connection with one Local Church, but only (i) where Standing Order 605A(1) is in operation, or (ii) under a scheme adopted by the Church Council and the Circuit Meeting under this Standing Order, or (iii) under a scheme within Standing Order 605A(2).

(2) More Local Churches than one may share the use of a chapel or other local property, but only under a scheme adopted by the Church Councils and the Circuit Meeting or Meetings involved.....

8.8 Standing Order 943 - Closure of Chapels

(1) Public services may not be discontinued in any chapel or preaching-place, nor any preaching-place removed from the circuit plan, until permission has been given by the Synod on the recommendation of the managing trustees, the Circuit Meeting and the district Policy Committee. The Circuit Meeting shall submit any such recommendation to the district committee before any steps are taken to carry the intention into effect.

Section 9

Equality Impact Assessment

Protected Characteristic	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Mitigation
Age	None	Potential	The reduction in number of buildings may impact of this group who may have to travel further. This can be mitigated by arrangements for supported travel where necessary.
Disability	Potential	Potential	More accessible worship of various forms. The reduction in number of buildings may impact of this group who may have to travel further. This can be mitigated by arrangements for supported travel where necessary.
Sex	None	None	Neutral impact
Gender	None	None	Neutral impact
Gender Reassignment	None	None	Neutral impact
Pregnancy and Parenting	None	None	Neutral impact
Marriage and Civil Partnership	None	None	Neutral impact
Ethnicity	None	None	Neutral impact
Sexual Orientation	None	None	Neutral impact
Religious Belief	None	None	Neutral impact
Socio-economic factors	None	Potential	The reduction in number of buildings may impact of poorer sectors of society who may have to travel further. This can be mitigated by arrangements for supported travel where necessary.
Other factors	None	None	Neutral impact

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- ⁱ The exception to this is St. Andrews, which is a Methodist and United Reformed Local Ecumenical Partnership.
- ⁱⁱ Faith and Order report *Called to Love and Praise*. The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice, adopted by Conference 1999, reaffirmed in Conference report 2017
- ⁱⁱⁱ SO 500(1) The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 2
- ^{iv} question 43 in A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 2000)
- ^v Estimate by the Circuit Leadership Team July 2022
- ^{vi} Membership number from Circuit Preaching Plan
- ^{vii} Data source Statistics for Mission Methodist Web site.
- ^{viii} [Discipleship Pathways: travelling together \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)
- ^{ix} p.1
- ^x (*Charles Wesley*) *O thou who camest from above, Singing the Faith* 564
- ^{xi} Covenant Service, The Methodist Worship Book, p.288
- ^{xii} Discipleship ... and the people called Methodist, Rev. Martyn Atkins, 2010, p.55
- ^{xiii} question 46 in A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 2000)
- ^{xiv} p.4
- ^{xv} p.7
- ^{xvi} SO 601 The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 2
- ^{xvii} Para. 4.3, *Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership* Conference Report 2022
- ^{xviii} 2020 Conference receiving the report Reaffirming Our Calling: Oversight and Trusteeship
- ^{xix} 33 Methodist Conference Agenda, 1990, the Ministry of the People of God in the World, pp.539
- ^{xx} Stationing Review Group, 2008, 4.
- ^{xxi} Peter Ward, *Liquid Church*, Paperback 9781620329801, Published: March 2013
- ^{xxii} www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness ISSN 2058-5969 HOLINESS The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge Volume 2 (2016) Issue 3 (Holiness & Contemporary Culture): pp. 337–358
- ^{xxiii} Bible Society Lumino Insights