

A Lenten Update and an Invitation to Action

'At the heart of this invitation is the belief that the search for justice in the church and in the world is the foundation of who we are as Methodists.'

The [Open Letter to the British Methodist Church](#), written in what feels like a Kairos moment, was shared in June 2020 and went on to receive over 700 signatures. Since then, all of the signatories have been invited to join in conversations via Zoom on several occasions to continue to dream and to develop the thinking of the Open Letter, exploring what needs to happen for its vision to be realised. It is now the start of Lent 2021, and the methodology using Open Space conversations continues. In this way, clear goals and objectives are emerging.

The following declaration attempts to summarise the thinking so far and reflects a range of ideas and actions. Some of these are already reflected in Connexional initiatives and this is a cause for celebration. Others will require further engagement and commitment from Methodists to ensure they come onto and remain on the agenda for the British Methodist Church. This can be achieved, and is already happening through personal, local church, circuit and district actions and through the formal structures of Methodist Conference.

At the heart of this invitation is the belief that the search for justice in the church and in the world is the foundation of who we are as Methodists, not just one piece of the jigsaw. We strive for a church which embodies dignity and solidarity. We commit to work for racial justice, gender justice, justice for those who identify as LGBTQI+, environmental justice, economic justice, justice for all who have been marginalised.

If you are not already a part of this conversation and movement towards action, and you would like to be, please email methodistopenletter@gmail.com

The Vision

A Methodist Churchⁱ with social justiceⁱⁱ at its heart as a key priority for growthⁱⁱⁱ embedded within discipleship and evangelism

In order to achieve this:

There is a need to create an environment which will engender deep systemic and cultural change

This will involve (Goals):

- ***Greater grass roots participation in decision making and the setting of strategy***
- ***Developing a flexible use of resources***
- ***The Church having a 'louder clearer voice' into situations of social injustice***

ⁱ We would always want to work ecumenically and in partnership with others where possible, but this document is specifically about a Methodist vision and does not therefore lend itself directly to speaking about ecumenical involvement.

ⁱⁱ By justice we understand deep listening and caring, partnership and co-operation, the showing of compassion and mercy, genuine inclusivity, honest transparency rather than soundbite and rhetoric, and a total re-evaluation of who and what is most important.

ⁱⁱⁱ We see growth as being spiritual, social and personal as well as numerical

The following specific objectives have been identified within the conversations as potential ways of reaching these goals and fulfilling the vision which has been defined.

Greater grass roots participation in decision making and the setting of strategy

- Make Conference a 'year-round' conferring body using Zoom or similar.
- Embed conferring into the Connexion at all levels in order to achieve a less hierarchical feel - find and listen to the voices of young people specifically, and all those in the pews, the marketplaces, and communities on and of the margins.
- Seek greater transparency, grass roots involvement and positive action in appointments to committees, voluntary roles, and the Presidency.
- Encourage all churches to conduct an audit of priorities – what we will do and what we won't do - whilst emerging from lockdown, challenging congregations to use this liminal moment in a missional way and including people on the margins of the church.

Developing a flexible use of resources

- Advocate for a total re-think of Connexional structures (District and Circuit), which is not a re-arrangement of what currently exists but something more fundamental that releases people to focus on social justice alongside discipleship and evangelism, and not just on buildings, finance and numerical growth.
- Use church land and buildings for permanently affordable housing (e.g. Community Land Trusts, best value disposals, partnerships with Registered Social Landlords) and voluntary/cell communities.
- Use church land and buildings creatively within the community, seeking partnerships with other community-based organisations to meet local needs.
- Seek to change Standing Orders to allow other World Faith communities to use Methodist buildings for worship.
- Explore creative ways to redistribute wealth across the connexion, placing money and personnel into work with people experiencing poverty and those who suffer injustice. For example, churches and circuits with significant Model Trust Funds offering interest free loans or grants to churches and circuits working at the economic margins.

The Church having a 'louder clearer voice' into situations of social injustice

- Establish a Connexional Campaigns Team to assist the Methodist Church to:
 - campaign openly on justice issues, not restricted by the need for ecumenical consensus or the work programme of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)
 - be able to speak swiftly and clearly, through local and national leaders, into situations of injustice
 - support, and be informed by, those engaged in direct, prophetic action in situations of injustice
 - Support, and be informed by, those holding local or national political office
- Find ways of giving JPIT a higher profile within the British Methodist Church as a policy, research and advocacy body by, for example, reporting annually to Conference.
- Re-affirm a commitment to organisations which have historically been part of the Methodist Family - Action for Children, MHA, All We Can and The Fund for Human Need, recognising them as more than the recipients of fund-raising but as key partners and expert witnesses as the church speaks into situations of social injustice. In addition, explicitly partner with other organisations such as the Fairtrade Foundation, Christian Aid, Eco Church and Citizens UK, which are focused on changing the systems which keep people across the world in poverty.
- Re-discover and define anew an identity which respects the origins of the Methodist tradition of placing social justice at the heart of the Christian life.
- Promote existing and continue to produce new theological materials and resources for prioritising social justice, for lay, ordained and those in ministerial formation. This could include, for example, a social justice lectionary and preaching resources.