



The **Methodist Church**
Southampton District

Handbook
for
Circuit Stewards
in the
Southampton District

This handbook, updated in July 2013 is based on original work done in the Birmingham and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Districts with thanks for all their original hard work.

Julia Wills: Training Officer

CIRCUIT STEWARD HANDBOOK

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

You may at this stage be considering the possibility of becoming a Circuit Steward or you may have been one for a few years. You will see from this Handbook that the work of a Circuit Steward is varied and vital, it's about sharing the leadership of your Circuit, supporting Ministers and resourcing mission. You don't need to be able to do everything but you may well be asked to do a lot! On behalf of the District, I would like to thank you very much for all that you have under-taken to do for the Church in your Circuit, may it be done in the name of Jesus.

Andrew Wood: Chair of Southampton District

OUR CALLING

The calling of The Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

The Church exists to

- ★ *increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love*
- ★ *help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care*
- ★ *be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice*
- ★ *make more followers of Jesus Christ*

Conference 2000

PRIORITIES FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world: and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

1. Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer
2. Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor – in Britain and worldwide
3. Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved
4. Encouraging fresh ways of being Church
5. Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

Conference 2004

WHAT IS A CIRCUIT STEWARD?

Circuit Stewards love God, the Church, the world and especially those fellow workers committed to their care. They rely on both the grace of God and the expertise they have developed in other fields to carry them through this task.

The role of a Circuit Steward is both a practical and strategic job enabling individuals to find fulfilment in Christian service and as such each Circuit Steward will discover different and personal ways to respond to God's call.

The Circuit Stewards are responsible, with the Superintendent and Ministers, Deacons and Probationers appointed to the Circuit, for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit, and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting. Standing Order (SO)531 (1) (Standing Orders can be found in Volume 2 of The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD) – see page 23 for details of CPD).

Circuit Stewards share collective responsibility for leadership as members of the Circuit Leadership Team along with the Superintendent and Circuit Ministers and in that role have specific duties.

From that general responsibility it follows that the Circuit Stewards should:

1. exercise a general pastoral care for the Circuit staff and their families
2. meet as a Leadership Team at least twice a year, before the Circuit Meeting
3. keep themselves informed of the activities of each local church
4. be aware of District and Connexional policies affecting the Circuit and its churches
5. be sensitive to the needs of the Circuit and its officers and staff
6. inform themselves of developing movements in Methodism and the Church generally
7. be alert to and take advice on the legal consequences of their office and its responsibilities, eg lay employment, finance, property
8. develop vision and plan for mission within the Circuit, ensuring appropriate consultation

... and arrange in a manner suitable to the Circuit how these responsibilities are exercised.

Quote: 'When I became a Circuit Steward, I wish I'd known where I could find some guidance on the wide range of situations in which I become involved'. (Well, we hope this Handbook will be of help to many!)

PERSON SPECIFICATION FOR CIRCUIT STEWARDS

ESSENTIAL

A person who:

1. has a Christian faith and a commitment to serve
2. is willing to be supportive and affirming of others
3. has personal credibility, is confident, able to maintain confidentiality, committed and willing to work in a voluntary capacity
4. has strong communication skills, ideally able to speak at Circuit events and to contribute within services and elsewhere on behalf of the Circuit
5. has some of the following skills: an administrator, team worker, minute secretary, property administrator and managing trustee
6. is consultative, with the ability to be analytical and to contribute to the Leadership Team
7. has a sense of humour
8. is an agent for change

DESIRABLE

A person who:

1. has managerial experience and/or some understanding of employment law, given the Circuit's responsibility for the employment of Lay Employees
2. has a working knowledge of Methodist Church structures and protocols and some experience of Circuit Meetings and events
3. exercises flexibility
4. is tenacious
5. has the ability to ask for help
6. is supportive of Ministers
7. has sensitivity
8. has an understanding family
9. has a willingness to learn on the job
10. has some financial understanding
11. possesses negotiating skills

SPECIFIC DUTIES OF CIRCUIT STEWARDS

The Circuit Meeting is a focal point for the Leadership Teams of the Circuit churches. Its responsibilities combine spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency. Its concern includes pastoral and evangelism work, training needs, approval of those ready for admission as Local Preachers and (annually) of Circuit Stewards. Through its policies, procedures, and decisions it needs to nurture ministry and mission, ensuring accurate representation from within the Circuit. Members of the Circuit Meeting, and hence Circuit Stewards, are Managing Trustees for Circuit property (normally manses) and funds. The general powers of Managing Trustees are identified in CPD. The Circuit Steward team are expected to share the following responsibilities between them:

FINANCES AND THE CIRCUIT FUND (see page 11):

The Circuit Stewards are the treasurers of the Circuit Fund. SO 532.

It is the Circuit Stewards' duty to ensure that the Circuit Fund is managed properly and efficiently according to current accounting principles and money management so as to comply with the obligations imposed upon them by SO 532. That will require one Circuit Steward of acknowledged competence to assume especial responsibility for the Circuit Fund or, if there is no such steward then another competent person who is directly responsible to the Circuit Stewards.

INVITATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS (see page 16):

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for proposals for invitations to Ministers and Deacons to serve in the Circuit and for negotiating with Ministers over appointments to the Circuit and to a chaplaincy, the pastoral oversight of youth and community work and to a team ministry: SO 534 and 540(1).

MANSES (see page 14):

The Circuit Stewards are responsible for the interior repair and decoration and furnishing of the manses: SO 533.

The improvement, repair, maintenance, suitability and location of manses are matters for which the Circuit and District are responsible through different bodies.

MEETINGS: CHURCH COUNCILS, CIRCUIT MEETINGS AND DISTRICT SYNOD: (see page 19)

One Circuit Steward is to be appointed to each Church Council and at least one to the District Synod.

The Circuit Stewards are ex officio members of and entitled to attend all official meetings connected with the Circuit – except the Local Preachers Meeting unless they are themselves Local Preachers.

Circuit Stewards should decide amongst themselves which of their number are to attend the various meetings and then to report back to all.

SAFEGUARDING

The specific responsibilities of Circuit Stewards can be found on page 47 of the **Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy** document which is available from

Methodist Publishing (£20 plus p + p). It is also available to view and/or download from the Methodist Church website: www.methodist.org.uk.

The responsibilities of Circuit Stewards where safeguarding is concerned are:

To ensure that groups or events follow Safeguarding policy and procedures (in the case of regular groups, the guidance for Church Councils should be followed);
To ensure that training initiatives are developed and delivered and that office holders attend.

Whilst these are the 'official' responsibilities of Circuit Stewards, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and if you have any concerns or queries it is important to contact the Safeguarding Officer whose details can be found in the District Directory.

EMPLOYMENT OF LAY PEOPLE

As a Circuit Steward, one of your responsibilities may be to become involved in the area of lay employment within the Circuit. The scope of this responsibility will depend on whether the Circuit is merely thinking of employing someone, whether it already has a lay employee(s), and what sort of lay employment issues arise as a result.

Your involvement could cover areas such as: considering the possibility of recruiting a lay employee and how that fits with the Circuit's vision; the recruitment process itself, and preparation of relevant documentation; becoming a line manager and the practical issues involved with that; dealing with employment issues which may arise, like discipline/grievance procedures, maternity leave/ pay and even redundancy.

However, you are not expected to have all the answers and, whilst a basic knowledge or some experience of employment will always be useful, you are strongly encouraged to contact the District Lay Employment Adviser, with any queries, who can support and advise you, and provide you with all the necessary up-to-date documentation. Details of the Lay Employment Adviser can be found in the District Directory.

CIRCUIT STEWARDS: NOTES ON GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. SUPPORT AND CARE:

- Be available for Circuit staff and seek help if need be
- Be sensitive to needs and situations
- Provide support rather than make inappropriate demands
- Be aware of special arrangements which are necessarily needed for World Church/American Interns
- Offer listening/supportive role to Minister/Lay Employees
- Be available if necessary to intercede between Minister/Lay Employees and local church
- Participate as appropriate in the Circuit Staff review process

2. OFFER HELP TO INCOMING/OUTGOING MINISTER/LAY EMPLOYEE

- Prepare welcome pack
- Discuss welcome or farewell service with Superintendent
- Publicise events and arrival well in advance
- Make contact with sensitivity
- Consider particular circumstances with young families/retirement
- Make time for social contact

3. CIRCUIT STEWARDSHIP: TEAM WORK

- Let each Circuit Steward work with one or a group of churches
- Try to attend services and events as well as Church Councils
- Let your role be known within the congregation
- Exchange information with other Circuit Stewards
- Allocate one Circuit Steward to work with one Minister/Lay Employee

4. ATTEND MEETINGS

- Make an effort to attend Synod and any specially arranged District meetings
- Work with Superintendent/Leadership Team to make meetings more efficient and effective
- Ensure proper preparation for meetings
- Share with other Stewards attendance at meetings

5. CREATE A SENSE OF CIRCUIT COMMUNITY:

- Organise Circuit Day for all churches to worship together
- Circuit Fundraising/event/retreat/quiet day
- Be present and make yourself known
- Join Circuit review sessions

6. **THE WORK EXTENDS BEYOND THE CIRCUIT BOUNDARIES:**
- Participate in area Circuit Steward meetings
 - Keep abreast of Methodist Recorder and sister church publications
 - Surf the Methodist Church web site
 - Keep informed of Synod, Conference and Connexion decisions/policies
 - Ministers as well as Circuit Stewards have responsibility to disseminate information from District and Connexion
 - Be aware of 'other mother churches', if your Circuit has LEP churches
7. **ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY:**
- The Circuit Meeting has overall responsibility
 - Be aware of where to get advice on matters of: property, lay employment, safeguarding, finance, charity (see the **District Synod Directory**, available from the District Administrator)
 - Ensure records of Circuit business are maintained and accessible
 - Never be afraid to ask for guidance from District or another Circuit
 - Keep an up-to-date District Synod Directory at hand
 - For any matter of discipline, confer with your friendly District Chair
8. **CIRCUIT VISION:**
- Live by Kingdom Values
 - Share spirituality
 - Organise review/discussion/consultation/vision days
 - Keep the work/mission/vision of the Circuit under constant review
 - Be alert to changing patterns of ministry within the Methodist and wider Church
 - Prayer
9. **PRACTICALITIES:**
- Let one member of the team take responsibility for Circuit finances
 - Let each Circuit manse have its own Manse Steward
 - Let one member of the team take responsibility for co-ordinating all property matters (all manse and church building matters)
 - Ensure you offer adequate support and information to your successor (possibly using this handbook as your transition checklist)
 - Use **CPD** which is now available as a free downloadable pdf from www.methodist.org.uk.

(LEP) : Local Ecumenical Partnership

(CPD): **Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church**

Quote: 'I would have become a Circuit Steward sooner if I'd known it was possible to share the responsibilities around the team'

FINANCES

THE CIRCUIT FUND

The Circuit Stewards are collectively treasurers of the Circuit Fund. Most Circuits have one of their stewards who has the necessary skills and knowledge to take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the Circuit Funds. Otherwise the Circuit must secure a competent person to carry out these duties under close supervision of the stewards.

NB: The term 'Circuit Treasurer' does not occur in CPD. The responsibility lies with the Circuit Stewards. However, it is now common practice to appoint one of the Circuit's Stewards as Circuit Treasurer, who could take the majority of the responsibility on behalf of the Circuit Stewards.

The Circuit Stewards have to present to the Circuit Meeting a forecast budget covering a 12 month period and an indication of how the costs will be met. Sometimes Circuit Projects will require long-term financial planning. Discussion with individual Church Treasurers is essential when assessing contributions from the Churches prior to presenting figures to the Circuit Meeting for its consideration. Some Circuits hold a meeting of treasurers whilst other Circuits approach each Church Treasurer on a one-to-one basis. It should always be treated as a sensitive issue.

The Circuit Stewards must ensure that stipends and agreed rates of allowances to meet Circuit expenses are paid to Ministers and other staff including any Lay Employees. Ministerial Staff payroll is managed by the Finance Department at Church House. Lay employees can be paid locally but this would require some experience of PAYE. Many circuits are now opting to use payroll services at Church House for lay employees.

In exercising financial control the Circuit Stewards know that SO 012(1) states: *'Methodist money shall not be held in private accounts but in official bank accounts requiring the signatures of, or electronic authorisation by, two persons for withdrawals'*

Many of the major banks do not operate a dual authorisation of electronic payments unless you are a corporate customer and will charge (most Circuits do not fit into the corporate system). However CAF Bank provides this service free as do the Co-op Bank and Lloyds TSB.

Circuit Stewards must maintain the payment of financial obligations as set out in the annual budget, eg payment to District funds, the upkeep of Circuit properties (manses) etc

The financial year is from 1 September – 31 August. The annual accounts are presented to the Circuit Meeting having been examined by a qualified person.

THE FINANCIAL ROLE OF THE CIRCUIT STEWARD

SO 532 states that the Circuit Stewards are the treasurers of the Circuit Fund and that they should:

1. collect assessments
2. provide for the stipends due to Circuit staff
3. pay staff expenses
4. discharge any other financial claims on the Circuit agreed in the budget
5. pay assessment to the District for the Methodist Church Fund and the District Expenses

As SO 635 states, it is the responsibility of Church Treasurers to pay the assessment set by the Circuit Meeting.

The Methodist Financial Year runs from 1 September to 31 August. However, the work for a particular financial year starts well before 1 September and ends long after 31 August. The following is the list of activities for a typical Financial Year (Year 1):

Date	Action
December Year 0	Provide figures for applications for Connexional funds for Year 1
February/ March Year 0	<p>Set budget and assessments for Year 1 for presentation at Circuit Meeting. Connexion will have sent information on stipends, pensions and travel expenses for Year 1 and advice on tax matters. District Treasurer will have sent District Assessment and the Methodist Church Fund assessment. Other expenses will have to be judged from previous years, bearing in mind inflation or other indications of increases.</p> <p>Assessments can be set in a variety of ways. Ideally these should not be based solely on membership but take into account such items as giving, investment income etc and also reflect the 'ability to pay'. The share system is also used by a number of Circuits where churches volunteer how much they can afford to give. It is useful to receive each church's accounts and often valuable to have a meeting of all Church Treasurers.</p>
August Year 0	Church assessments are due monthly in advance eight days before the beginning of each month and the stipends payment is due four working days before the beginning each month. It is useful to do as many of these if possible, by transfer through Central Finance Board or Bank accounts. These transactions should be recorded in the accounts for Year 1 if accruals accounting is used (a requirement for Circuits whose income or expenditure is in excess of £250,000 in a year).

Date	Action
September Year 1	District Assessment is due by the seventh day of each month. Again a direct transfer is advisable. Other payments should be made during the year as required.
End of November Year 1	Circuit Staff should submit expenses claims at least quarterly from end November Year (or monthly if preferred). Providing an expense form for staff to use ensures a standard format of claims.
End of May Year 1	Forms P11D will be provided by Methodist Church House and need to be completed and returned to them for each member of staff. These contain details of 'benefits in kind' received by staff in the financial year ending 5 April and will include relevant expenditure since 6 April in Year 0. The Dictionary of Taxation from Ministerial Benefits at Methodist Church House gives good advice on what to include.
August Year 1	It is best to try and pay all amounts due before the end of the month and bank all money received to avoid complications with accruals in the accounts.
September Year 2	A statement of accounts should be presented to the Circuit Meeting.
October Year 2	Accounts need to be audited (if income or expenditure over £500,000) by a qualified auditor or independently examined by a suitably competent person – not a member of the Circuit Meeting.
End of November Year 2	<p>The Standard Form of Accounts should be completed, signed by treasurer, auditor/ independent examiner and Superintendent and sent to the District Treasurer.</p> <p>The agreed Circuit Reserves Policy must be submitted with the accounts</p>

Clearly the above does not cover basic activities such as book-keeping, record-keeping, opening bank accounts, changing signatories, reconciling bank statements, drawing up and presenting annual accounts and making the best use of resources, funds and reserves.

Circuit Stewards should also be aware of the fact that Supernumerary Ministers are entitled to payment for all services that they lead and relevant expenses and ensure that systems are in place to guarantee these payments are made. Circuits are advised by Finance Department annually of the recommended preaching fee and mileage rate for Supernumeraries.

If you need more guidance, contact the District Treasurer (see the District Synod Directory)

MANSES/PROPERTY

Since January 2010, Districts have had full responsibility for giving consent to all Property Schemes and these schemes are submitted on-line by Churches & Circuits. Circuit Stewards are fully involved with Schemes related to Manses and any other Circuit properties. Experience has shown that they will also frequently be involved with Schemes put forward by Local Churches.

Property Schemes requiring consent are described in Standing Order 930 and include all sales and purchases, leases and rentals but not furnishings or the execution of non-structural repairs. **ALL** Listed Buildings/Conservation Area works require consent by Connexional Listed Buildings Officer prior to District consideration.

The District Property Secretary & District Consents Panel Members are available for advice & guidance in this connection (see the District Synod Directory for contact details).

The duties and responsibilities of a Circuit/Circuit Property Steward in relation to manses are briefly summarised as follows;

1. Liaise regularly with Ministers on the state of manses and undertake renovations and repairs as necessary;
2. Arrange for Quinquennial inspections to be carried out every 5 years on each manse; review the findings and recommendations of the inspectors and take any necessary action; send copies of Schedule E and the Quinquennial report to the District Manses Secretary;
3. Prepare the annual property schedules (Schedule C), both of accounts and investments and of the state of the properties, and take any action required;
4. Be involved in matters such as the purchase, sale, extension or alteration of manses and take appropriate action in collaboration with the District and the Connexional Property Office in Manchester (see page 22);
5. Open and maintain a log book for the retention of the annual property schedules and other relevant material, and ensure that the log book is kept up to date. Establish a file for each manse in which to retain Quinquennial reports, work sheets, invoices, guarantees, inspection certificates, etc Be aware of the annual sum for manse maintenance recommended by Synod.
6. Present a report on the local property to the Circuit Meeting annually and after every Quinquennial inspection.

See SO 533, 803, 952, 953, 954

CARE OF MANSES

Before the arrival of a new Minister, arrange for the following duties to be performed where necessary

- Carpets cleaned
- Paintwork washed
- Curtains cleaned
- Cupboards – empty and clean
- Cooker clean- both hob and oven in good working order
- Refuse from previous occupant removed
- Any disarrangement rectified, everything restored to previous positions
- Where possible provide a list of useful names and addresses
- Hedges and shrubs trimmed
- Lawns cut
- Beds weeded
- Rubbish removed
- Sheds clean and empty
- Garage(s) empty

Also ensure for all manses that there are adequate smoke detectors and fire blankets and that annual gas inspections are carried out. Where practicable, install a broadband connection in each manse.

NB the sale or purchase of manses and church buildings requires separate District procedures and guidance should be sought from District officers.

ANNUAL PROPERTY RETURN

An annual return for all manses is required via the on line system

NB 1 CPD Part 2 pages 730/731 provides a Charter for incoming Ministers and Deacons.

NB 2 Be aware of taxation implications - see Finance Section under P11D
This is because some work done on manses when the Minister is in residence can be classed as 'benefit in kind' and would be taxable and has to be reported. It can get very complicated!

If you need more guidance, contact the Manses Secretary (see District Directory)

Quote: 'when I became a Circuit Steward, I wish I'd known that I was supposed to look after the Ministers'

INVITATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Each year the Stationing Committee issues a Connexional Good Practice guide for everyone involved in stationing. The guide is intended to help all those involved in the invitation and stationing process and should be read in conjunction with Conference requirements. These are set out in the latest edition of CPD.

Your responsibility as a Circuit Steward is to ensure that the process is adhered to by the Circuit and individual churches. Ministers should expect consistency in the application of the process. Do not assume you know the process because you have been involved with it before.

The process generally follows the pattern as indicated in the table below (note - some of the dates will vary from year to year):

Timing	Who is involved	Action
March	Circuit Meeting	Appoint Circuit Invitation Committee (which may have delegated powers to offer initial invitations)
May-July	District Chair/Lay Stationing Representative Ministers involved in reviews/moves and their partners Superintendents Circuit Stewards	District briefing meeting to explain the process <i>Connexional Good Practice</i> guide distributed
	Circuit Stewards	Period of reflection on Circuit's policy and future needs
	Minister & Circuit Stewards	Period of reflection and discernment conversations to establish whether Minister wishes an extension to be considered
If the Minister decides that he/she wishes to apply for an extension		
May-July	Minister and household members Circuit Stewards	Meet to consider any personal or family issues
	Circuit Invitation Committee Circuit Leadership Team Superintendent Minister	Meet to plan and agree the consultation process (District Chair or their representative is invited if a Superintendency is being considered)

Timing	Who is involved	Action
July- August	Church Stewards	Consultation in local churches (max. 3 weeks)
	Circuit Stewards Church Stewards from other churches in the Circuit	Consultation in other Circuit churches (if for a Superintendent's extension)
	Circuit Stewards	Consultation in other areas of Minister's work eg ecumenical work; chaplaincies.
	Circuit Stewards	Gather all responses and prepare written report for the Circuit Invitation Committee
	Circuit Invitation Committee	Meets to receive Circuit Stewards' report and decide its recommendation to September Circuit Meeting
	Circuit Invitation Committee	Prepares a reasoned statement and sends it to District Chair and Lay Stationing Representative at least 3 weeks before the Circuit Meeting
	District Chair Lay Stationing Representative	Approve reasoned statement (and amend it if necessary)
	Circuit Stewards Minister	Recommendation is conveyed to the Minister. If the Minister does not agree to it, he/she may prepare their own reasoned statement
	Circuit Meeting Secretary	Distributes reasoned statement(s) to members of Circuit Meeting at least 14 days before the meeting with an explanation of the voting procedure
On or before 20 Sept	Circuit Meeting	Considers the extension and votes
After the Circuit Meeting	Chair of Circuit Meeting	Reports the Circuit Meeting's decision to the District Chair (<i>and Warden of the Diaconal Order if the decision is about a Deacon</i>)

If a vacancy arises		
Timing	Who is involved	Action
May - Sept	Circuit Stewards	Vacancy is notified as soon as it is known about to the District Chair <i>and (for Diaconal appointments) the Warden of the Diaconal Order</i>
	Circuit Invitation Committee Circuit Leadership Team Superintendent District Chair Lay Stationing Rep Ministers	Consultation and decisions about the appointment(s) to be filled
	Circuit Stewards	Prepare draft profiles
	District Chair Lay Stationing Representative	Comment on draft Circuit profiles
By 5 Sept	Circuit Stewards	<i>Draft Diaconal stationing profiles to be with Warden of the Diaconal Order</i>
By 24 Sept	Circuit Stewards	Probationer application forms to District Chair
By 27 Sept	Circuit Stewards	<i>Deacons' profiles and Circuit profiles requesting a Diaconal appointment to be with Warden of the Diaconal Order</i>
By 27 Sept	District Chair	Probationer application forms to Connexional Team
By 1 Oct	Presbyters Circuit Stewards	Presbyter profiles and Circuit profiles (for presbyter appointments) to District Chair

Circuit Stewards should familiarise themselves with the whole process and at the March Circuit Meeting ensure that an Invitation Committee is appointed and what powers are delegated to the committee.

The September Circuit Meeting needs to be held early in the month to allow time for the decision to be forwarded to the District.

The whole process of stationing and/or offering an extension is stressful for the Circuit but very much more so for the Minister and family. It is the Circuit Stewards job to ensure that all consultations are conducted as sympathetically as possible and this is best achieved by following the guidelines at all stages. Remember that support is available within the District.

If you need more guidance, contact the Lay Stationing Representative (see District Synod Directory)

MEETINGS: CHURCH COUNCILS, CIRCUIT MEETINGS AND THE DISTRICT SYNOD

Circuits work in different ways and have a variety of patterns of meetings. Meetings may include:

Circuit Stewards
Leadership Team
Circuit Meetings

Manses Committee
Property Committee
District Meetings

CHURCH COUNCILS

A Circuit Steward is an ex-officio member of, and entitled to attend, all official meetings connected with the Circuit, except for local preachers meetings (unless they are a local preacher). Any Circuit Steward is therefore entitled to attend the Church Council of any church within the Circuit. One Circuit Steward should be appointed, by the Circuit Stewards, to attend each Church Council (SO 610). It is important to note that LEPs will have different governance arrangements.

The Circuit Steward will be able to:

- represent the Circuit at the meeting
- offer information on matters relating to Circuit events and Circuit policy
- gather information on local church events or concerns that need to be reported back to the rest of the Circuit Leadership Team

DISTRICT SYNOD (REPRESENTATIVE SESSION)

Synod is the policy making court of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and connexional team on one hand, and the Circuits and local churches on the other.

Under SO 410 one Circuit Steward of each Circuit in the District is a representative to Synod. Each Circuit also sends lay representatives: these will often include the other Circuit Stewards. All Ministerial staff stationed in the District attend too.

At Synod there are opportunities to:

- meet with representatives from other Circuits
- find out what is happening in the District
- pass on information relating to the Circuit
- vote on resolutions
- elect representatives to Conference

The nominated steward will report back to the other Circuit Stewards who have not attended Synod

MAKING MEETINGS WORK

If you are responsible for the meeting use the following questions as a checklist as you prepare

If you are attending a meeting that isn't working use them to diagnose what's wrong and help make the meeting more effective

THIRTEEN KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Is there a clear purpose/agenda?
2. Are the appropriate people present?
3. Is there an agreed finishing time?
4. Do people know why they are there – have they been given enough information to make an informed decision?
5. Do people know and trust each other?
6. Is the meeting chaired fairly and clearly?
7. Is someone taking minutes or notes?
8. Has the necessary preparation been done?
9. Is there clarity about the decisions being made, and are decisions properly followed up by named individuals?
10. Are any special needs being addressed, eg hearing impairment, transport needs, meeting times?
11. Is the environment/meeting place appropriate and conducive to the business of the meeting ie can everyone see and hear each other?
12. Is there a need for confidentiality, and has this been addressed?
13. Are people offered refreshments?

EXTRACTS FROM TWO PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Terry Ayres reflects on being a Senior Circuit Steward in the Basingstoke Circuit

CPD refers to the ‘*spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit*’ as ingredients of the CS role. I would certainly find the job unsatisfying without becoming really involved with the congregations of the three churches I am linked with, their Church Councils and their aspirations for the kingdom – for that is the life-blood of the Circuit and of our Christian commitment! Professionally, I have been involved in much strategic planning and hence I do greatly appreciate my involvement in this aspect of Circuit life. Planning for the future of the Circuit, fully guided by the Holy Spirit, is a crucial aspect of the CS role.

Describing our role in terms of lists and things-to-do, buildings and annual schedules, gives only part of the story. I am convinced the role depends on relationships. We have a vibrant and imaginative team of Ministers and lay workers in our Circuit, and trying to develop appropriate care for them in our CS team is fundamental. The aim, surely, must be to have spirit-filled relationships with the Super (pivotal!), and with the other Ministers & Lay Employees, with the Churches, and with as many members whose names I can remember! Only then can we reflect on how things are going, and how folk are doing their job, and help the Circuit achieve its aims.

Kate Rawlins reflects on being a Circuit Steward in the North Dorset Circuit

... three tasks took me by surprise.

The first revolved around attending church council meetings and this took on a life of its own. It was easy, if tedious, to go to the meetings, but beyond that there was a need and desire to build relationships with those in the congregations. I was welcomed to their special events and services, confided in and showered with encouragement and support, with the occasional wise words of advice. In a rural Circuit such as this one, the small churches can often feel isolated and vulnerable. Having someone from the wider Church take an interest and support them can give a sense of self-worth, confidence and empowerment.

Alongside that there is the role of offering practical and pastoral support to the Ministers. Their humanity sometimes conflicts with the expectations churches and individuals put on them. Even trying to guard their day off can be a challenge. I found I could never do too much listening and upholding.

Finally, being part of the decision making in the Circuit was exciting. Being a steward gave me a wider view of District and Connexional activity. Trying to link the two together and attempting to lead the Circuit forward tested skill and strength and brought immense reward.

There is a lot to do, but the rewards were unexpected and God blessed abundantly. And I love the job!

THE STRUCTURE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

- Local churches (about 5,500 in England, Scotland and Wales) are grouped into **Circuits** (408+), each having a **Circuit Superintendent**. Circuits are grouped into **Districts** (31) led by a **District Chair**.
- The Methodist Church or **Connexion** is served nationally by the Connexional Team, most of whom are based at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Rd, London NW1 5JR (020 7486 5502).
- The Property and Resourcing Mission sections are at Central Buildings, Oldham St, Manchester M1 1JQ (0161 236 5194).
- There are posts for strategic development in areas such as Spirituality and Discipleship, Children and youth, Youth participation, Fresh Expressions, Evangelism in Contemporary Culture, etc
- The post of **General Secretary** provides overall co-ordination and strategic direction to the Connexion's work, under the guidance of the **Methodist Council**, a representative body.
- The policy-making body of the Methodist Church is the annual **Conference** to which the Districts send elected representatives both lay and ordained.
- A **President** and **Vice President** are elected and serve for one year.

KEY RESOURCES AND PEOPLE

In the **District Synod Directory**, issued each year for Synod in September, contact details can be found for:

- The District Chair
- The Synod Secretary
- The District Administrator
- The District Treasurer
- The District Grants Secretary
- The Lay Stationing Officer
- The District Youth Officer
- The Property Secretaries (Property and Finance)
- The Safeguarding Officer
- The Lay Employment Advisor
- A number of other officers and resource people

Extra copies of the **District Synod Directory** can be obtained from the Synod Secretary or the District Administrator.

OTHER KEY RESOURCES:

- Information about key areas such as mission, training, resources, development and change can be found on the district website: www.southamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk.
- Training resources can be accessed through **the Discipleship & Ministries Training Network**
- The current issue of **CPD – The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church** (this is now available for free download as a searchable pdf from www.methodist.org.uk)
- Publications and resources are available from Methodist Publishing: 17 Tresham Road, Orton Southgate, Peterborough PE2 6SG. Phone: 01733 235962, Email: www.mph.org.uk