

12. A justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah project

Contact name and details	Rachel Lampard – Walking with Micah project lampardr@methodistchurch.org.uk 020 7467 5248 The Revd Dr Joanne Cox-Darling – Chair, Mission Committee joanne.coxdarling@gmail.com Jude Levermore – Head of Mission levermorej@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	For approval
Resolutions	<p>12/1. The Conference adopts the Report, and commends it to the Methodist Church for prayerful study and action throughout the Connexion.</p> <p>12/2. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to agree a plan to enable and embed the proposals and suggestions set out between paragraphs 210 and 215 of the report in collaboration with key stakeholders, and oversee its implementation.</p> <p>12/3. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to review at least every five years through a transparent and participative process the Principles, Priorities and Practices adopted in this report to ensure that they still meet the needs of the Methodist Church and the world.</p> <p>12/4. The Conference thanks all those who participated in and contributed to the Walking with Micah project.</p>

Summary of content and impact

Subject and aims	This report proposes a framework to support the Methodist Church's action for justice over the next five years.
Main points	<p>Walking with Micah was a two-year project helping the Methodist Church to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking Church. This report is a response to our calling to act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with God, integral to a Methodist Way of Life.</p> <p>It draws on Methodist history, theology, current concerns and practice, and recommends a framework of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles for justice which underpin our understanding of God's justice and what it means to seek justice

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities for justice to focus Methodist efforts and resources on key issues, and • Practices for justice which help us to be more effective and rooted in God in our justice-seeking <p>The report recognises how much is being done in churches to tackle injustice, and recommends a two year programme to embed these principles, priorities and practices for justice further to support and encourage this work.</p>
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah/</p> <p>Updates to Methodist Council: MC/21/69 Report from the Connexional Team (para 20) MC/22/6 Report from the Connexional Team (para 18)</p>
Consultations	<p>The Justice Conversations (January – June 2023) included responses from a range of individuals, churches, schools and communities</p> <p>Conversations with a wide range of Methodist organisations and networks</p> <p>Presentations to and conversations with a number of Synods</p> <p>Consultations with Connexional Leaders’ Forum, Chairs’ Meeting, Methodist Council, Mission Committee</p> <p>“Accompaniers” from the Faith and Order Committee</p> <p>Workshops at 3Generate 2021 and Methodist Conference 2022</p>
Impact	<p>The report recommends that the Methodist Council be directed to agree a plan to enable and embed the proposals contained in the report. The financial costs of initial embedding is contained within the central services budget paper found elsewhere in the Agenda.</p> <p>As churches, Circuits and Districts align their work to the principles, priorities and practices it is likely that some local change management will be required. This is intended as a ‘doing differently’, not necessarily a ‘doing more’. Advice and support will be made available from connexional personnel.</p>

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The report in three minutes

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God, whose nature is just, yearns for justice in the world. As Christians we are called actively to do justice, show loving kindness and walk humbly with God. This invitation is at the heart of a Methodist Way of Life.

Methodists, now and in the past, have challenged injustice, worked for change and supported people experiencing injustices. As a Church, we have challenges of declining membership and limited energy, but we also have a commitment to being an inclusive, growing, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church. As we face economic, ecological, political and social changes in Britain and the world, the time is right for a renewed focus on justice and fresh approach for our Church.

This report proposes a framework to support the Methodist Church's action for justice over the next five years.

It offers six **Principles for justice**, which underpin our understanding of God's justice and what it means to seek justice:

- **God made humans in the image of God, each worthy of equal value and dignity.** The search for justice entails treating others with respect, and may involve reclaiming lost worth.
- **God desires the flourishing of creation and human community within it.** The search for justice does not diminish or limit the flourishing of others but seeks to enable it.
- **God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded.** The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty, and those who are marginalised in other ways, as a priority.
- **God entrusts those in power with a special responsibility for upholding justice.** Those seeking justice will encourage and challenge those with power to fulfil their vocation.
- **God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice, liberation and transformation.** It is never just someone else's responsibility. We all have a part to play.
- **God calls us to live in hope and in ways that reflect God's character and the pattern of God's kingdom.** Thus, seeking justice involves honesty and truth, and may demand protest and resistance, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation.

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These Principles will help us to talk about our understanding of God's justice and will be a tool to help us in our conferring, discernment and action.

The report offers five key **Priorities for justice**, which emerged from a process of listening and reflection. Methodists, in Local Churches and working with others, have the opportunity to make a difference. This may be through campaigning, being with those experiencing injustice and offering support, building relationships, or striving to tell a different story of a just world.

1. **Tackling inequality and poverty:** seeking life in all its fullness
2. **Enabling a flourishing environment:** right relationship between people, planet and God
3. **Seeking justice for refugees:** one people, one world
4. **Opposing discrimination:** all are made in the image of God
5. **Pursuing peace:** seeking justice and reconciliation

The Priorities for justice will focus our efforts and our resources to support Local Churches in their worship and action. Collaborating groups will come together to share and co-create campaigns, events and resources. Churches will be able to engage with Priorities that are most relevant in their context, through existing involvement or through actions that reflects their gifts.

Finally the report offers **Practices for justice**. These challenge people to consider both our ways of doing justice and our ways of being just, and how they can be consistent with each other.

Our **ways of doing** justice involve bringing about change in the systems that hold problems in place. Beyond short term practical help, this can include action to change structures, to build relationships, and to transform understanding. Our **ways of being just** enable us to be 'at our best' when seeking justice. They enable sustainable, transformative and rooted action for justice to develop in churches and communities, and keep our actions grounded in and guided by our faith.

Using these different Practices for justice will help us to examine our current and planned justice activities, ensuring both that they contribute to change and are consistent with our beliefs about God's justice.

A two-year process is proposed to embed this new framework for justice in the Methodist Church, and enable local churches to engage with and act on the Principles, Priorities and Practices for justice.

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Section 1: Introduction

What is justice like?

Where there is God's justice . . .

- ... it is so much bigger than simply fairness
- ... we may be surprised and find our ideas of justice are challenged
- ... people feel heard and their dignity is affirmed
- ... the bonds between people, communities, nations, generations, and all living things grow in beauty and significance
- ... power is shared and used to uphold truth and justice
- ... there is enough for all, no-one lives in poverty, in hunger, or is without
- ... there is liberation from all forms of slavery
- ... all creation flourishes, all is well
- ... there is real peace
- ... we get a sense of God's kingdom and God's purpose
- ... there is joy and hope for the future

When there is a lack of justice . . .

- ... we feel unseen and unheard
- ... we do not feel we can make a difference
- ... we are prevented from fully flourishing
- ... our relationships with one another become damaged
- ... trauma and disadvantage are transmitted through generations
- ... the most vulnerable bear the heaviest burden
- ... people with limited economic resources are overwhelmed by a rising tide of poverty
- ... creation is treated as a commodity to be abused, not treasured
- ... truth is distorted
- ... the future we can imagine is constrained

Seeking justice . . .

- ... looks like praying, listening, speaking, acting, giving, relating, co-operating, resisting . . . and so much more
- ... involves deep attentiveness to people who have experienced injustice
- ... means not only allying with people like us, but being with everyone who seeks the good of all
- ... may begin gradually with the human heart but seeps through to relationships, communities, institutions
- ... should inspire righteous anger, compassion, humility and hope
- ... means we become more aware of the forces that promote and sustain injustice, prejudice, neglect

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- ... requires of us to think in terms of long-term transformation as well as short-term solutions
- ... means making restitution where injustices have benefited us or others
- ... is about doing what we can in our own context and not being overwhelmed
- ... is a vocation for everyone
- ... requires a deep rootedness in God to sustain us
- ... helps us to know God better as we are part of building God's kingdom

1. There are many debates, philosophical and political, about the meaning of justice. Our own experiences may mean that we interpret the word in particular ways, perhaps in terms of punishment or fairness.
2. This report begins, however, by rooting itself in God's justice. This justice is at the very heart of God, we see its richness and complexity in the Bible, and we catch glimpses of it even in the midst of deep injustice. The words often translated as 'justice' in our Bibles speak of biblical obligations on society – and particularly on those, such as kings, with wealth and power. *Tzedakah* (righteousness) is often thought of as 'charity', but is less about generosity and more about obligation, what it means to be part of a community of God's people. *Mishpat* (justice) relates to justice delivered as a judgement, and to the consequent just society that is created from that judgement. God's judgement is called down with great joy because God is on the side of those who are labouring under injustice (Psalm 96). God's justice is seen in laws protecting strangers, in the prophets calling out injustice, in complex stories of liberation, healing and reconciliation. Jesus's death and resurrection showed that the alienation and injustices of the world do not have the last word, rather everyone is invited to participate in God's new kingdom of liberation, justice and joy.
3. God's perfect justice will always be beyond human endeavour. Whilst we seek to align ourselves to God's will as a Church committed to being justice-seeking, we recognise our ideas of justice will only ever be proximate to divine justice, and our human actions for justice will still be imperfect and insufficient.
4. At a time of crisis, when Israel was under attack from the Assyrian empire, the prophet Micah reminded God's people that they are bound together in a covenant relationship,

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, NRSVA)*

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5. These are not three distinct instructions. The call to act justly is not a separate vocation. Rather it is inextricably bound up with our calling to embody God's love in all that we do, and grow still closer to the perfect love and character of God by walking the way of God. The verb translated 'to do' can also mean 'to make'. It is a call not just to a passive avoidance of unjust action, but to an active commitment to bring about, or 'make', justice. This invitation is at the heart of a Methodist Way of Life.

Methodism and justice

6. The Methodist Church's commitment to justice-seeking is rooted in the development of our movement. From early Methodists who sought out the poorest in society and called out exploiters of the rich, through to involvement in justice for agricultural workers and an end to the slave trade, to more recent support for fair trade and campaigns for climate justice and an end to international debt, Methodists have often (though not unfailingly) sought to challenge injustice and bring about fairer and more just situations and structures. This desire for justice is rooted in our understanding and experience of a God who is just, and this shapes how we relate to each other and the wider world.
7. 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. A Methodist Way of Life is a rhythm of discipleship helping us put our response to this calling into practice, as individuals and communities. Amongst the commitments to worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism, we are encouraged to:
 - help people in our communities and beyond
 - care for creation and all God's gifts
 - challenge injustice
8. A Methodist Way of Life embodies our desire to be a growing, inclusive, justice-seeking and evangelistic Church. The Evangelism and Growth Strategy, *God for All*, makes clear that evangelism and justice are intertwined – a God whose character is just will shape the nature of the good news that we proclaim. As the Methodist Conference statement, *Called to Love and Praise*, says: "*The Gospel has to be both spoken and lived. The gospels show that 'good news and good works are inseparable', and that to preach the kingdom of God involves a commitment to justice and peace. So although Christians may differ in their respective*

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commitments to evangelism and social justice, the two tasks belong together.”¹

Research shows that children, young people and young adults in particular are hungry to be part of churches that are justice-seeking.² Many Local Churches already offer a just presence in local communities, building compassionate relationships, engaging in partnerships to meet short and longer term needs, and advocating for a world in which everyone can flourish. Through *God for All*, justice is being embedded in new Christian communities.

9. At the same time we also recognise that we fall short of what God desires for us. Many of us do not have direct contact with people living in poverty and experiencing injustice and we acknowledge that, as Methodist people, we have not always challenged injustice and that we continue to participate in oppressive structures. Not all people have experienced just practices within our own churches. Experiences of discrimination, as well as failures in safeguarding, have meant that for some people the Methodist Church has not been a place of justice. The *Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy* was agreed by the Conference in 2021 with the intention of achieving “a profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church”. An act of repentance was held by the Methodist Conference a year later, and training and measures to increase inclusion and diversity are being taken up across the Connexion along with a deep commitment to safeguarding practices. The Methodist Church’s commitment to be justice-seeking holds in tension the eternal call to be just with our daily need for repentance for our own injustice. Yet as Martin Johnstone, who led the Church of Scotland’s anti-poverty work, said: *“Every failure is not a sign that we will always fail. The road to justice is a long one, but it is one that we walk alongside others who walked it for centuries before us. For we believe that the kingdom will come on earth as it is already come in heaven.”*

Our changing world

10. A longing for justice is at the heart of our Methodist being, identity and strategy, and recent events have meant that the time is right for a renewed focus and fresh approach.

1 *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice*, 1999 para 3.2.4

2 *The Open Generation 03: Open to Impact*, barna.com/the-open-generation/open-to-justice, accessed 6 March 2023

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11. The last decade has seen enormous change in our society and around the world. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 a programme of austerity was introduced in the UK to eliminate public budget deficits. Although education, health and international development were protected in theory, there were significant reductions in welfare spending and local government funding, as well as key public services. These cuts hit the poorest hardest, leading to an increase in child poverty and a fall in life expectancy amongst the worst off in certain parts of the country. The current cost of living crisis is not new for many people, but has tipped them over into even deeper catastrophe.
12. Two key political referendums were held in the UK in recent years. The Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 resulted in a vote for Scotland to remain part of the UK. The Brexit Referendum of 2016 resulted in the UK formally ceasing to be a member state of the EU on 31 January 2020. Despite being supposedly decisive votes, both issues remain intensely contested and demonstrate deep fractures and polarisation. The constitutional scaffolding of the UK is under greater pressure. Many people from minority ethnic groups reported an increase in abuse and hate speech after the Brexit vote. Brexit continues to have a particular impact on Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and negotiations to untangle UK and EU relationships are still continuing.
13. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in over 200,000 deaths in the UK by the end of 2022. It shone a light on pre-existing health inequalities. Mortality was 2.6 times higher in the most deprived than the least deprived areas, and highest amongst Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean groups, and among people with a self-reported disability or a learning disability.³ Emergency measures to support incomes and businesses resulted in additional government spending of between £300-400 billion.⁴ And while inspiring forms of community solidarity were evident through the pandemic, isolation, addiction, domestic violence and mental ill health were also seen to increase.
14. The pandemic, together with Russia's war on Ukraine, added to inflationary pressures and a rise in international energy prices. Significant rises in fuel and food prices have contributed to a widespread cost of living crisis. People are increasingly turning to foodbanks, and churches and community groups have been running Warm Welcome spaces for people unable to afford to eat and heat their homes.

3 kingsfund.org.uk/publications/deaths-covid-19, accessed 6 March 2023

4 researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9309/CBP-9309.pdf, accessed 6 March 2023

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15. The last decade has seen sea levels rise and an increase in flooding, heatwaves, droughts and other extreme weather events. The least well off are carrying the biggest impact of the climate crisis. Despite the international agreements made through the COP summits, the world is set to emit enough carbon to exceed the 1.5°C global warming target within the next 10 years, with the planet's average temperature on a trajectory to reach 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century.⁵ There is an existential need for more urgent and radical action to tackle the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and environmental destruction.
16. In East Africa, the worst drought in 40 years has been exacerbated by rocketing global food prices, placing 22 million people at risk of starvation. At the end of 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. The war in Ukraine has led to the largest movement of refugees in Europe since the Second World War. This has added pressure to an already struggling international refugee protection system, but also raised questions about how different groups of refugees are treated.
17. The #MeToo movement showed the ongoing injustices of misogyny and violence against women and girls. LGBTQI+ people still experience discrimination and victimisation. Despite the embedding of equalities legislation in UK law, racism and race-related discrimination and inequalities still impact people's daily lives. The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, racist violence in this country and the US, as well as evidence of ongoing systemic problems in policing, education and maternity care has shone a light on the need to resist racism in society. Alongside this, there has been an increasing but not universal recognition of the need to act on the legacies of slavery and colonialism.
18. Such a description of our times can be overwhelming, as we feel buffeted on every side, witnessing or experiencing great need, injustice and oppression. Yet we are reminded by Paul, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21, *NRSVA*). At a time of such change and great pressures, it is important to take stock, to stand back and discern what God is calling us to do.

5 unfccc.int/documents/619180, accessed 6 March 2023

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What does this report aim to do?

19. This report offers a framework for the Methodist Church to understand and articulate its call to be justice-seeking, and to prioritise and collaborate in its responses. It does not offer a definitive position on the social and political issues of the time, nor does it make a claim for a complete Methodist social theology. What it aims to do instead is to deepen our confidence in understanding how the gospel speaks to the society in which we now live and offer focus on how we might respond.
20. This report is for disciples seeking to live a Methodist Way of Life as well as those who lead within our Church. It seeks to encourage and resource churches in local communities that are longing for justice. It is written with the hope that it will assist our whole Connexion as we seek to prioritise the use of resources.
21. This report identifies the Local Church very much as the locus of justice activity and transformation. Whilst individuals, groups in Circuits or Districts, networks regionally or nationally are also engaged in justice-seeking work and are important in bringing about change, they are not the key focus of this report and its recommendations. In order for the work to flourish and the Methodist Church and its people to remain true to Our Calling, justice work must remain central to the life of Local Churches. Individuals will live out their vocation to justice through other places or partnerships, and their involvement in coalitions and collectives enliven the Methodist Church's awareness of justice, but Local Churches are a microcosm of God's kingdom – a place where dreams of justice can be glimpsed, here and now. The kingdom is always bigger than the Church, and the Church does not need to do everything. But as with vocations to youth work, evangelism and worship leading, our vocations to justice need to be held within the community of the church to benefit from others' insights, offer holistic discipleship, meet with God in prayer, and enrich our common life.
22. Other reports⁶ have noted the challenging circumstances the Methodist Church currently finds itself in, with declining membership, leadership and resources; a heavy burden of responsibilities; uncertainty over the way forward and doubt in our own abilities. This report does not intend to further encumber, but to free – to give confidence in Methodist gifts and graces; to allow the laying down of some work; to release resources, people and leaders; and to offer a way ahead, following the God of justice.

6 For example, methodist.org.uk/media/27756/conf-22-pc-44-oversight-and-trusteeship.pdf, accessed 6 March 2023

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23. The process behind this report has been rooted in conversations and listening. Section 2 of this report gives an overview of what we have to learn from our theology, our hymns, our past, our current practices and what matters to Methodist communities now.
24. Section 3 identifies the key **Principles** that underpin our understanding of God's justice and what it means to seek justice. These are not exclusively Methodist, but have emerged from conversations across the Connexion. We hope these Principles will do three things: provide an anchor for us in God's justice in turbulent times; help us to articulate our call to justice, inside and beyond the Church; and give us tools for discernment and action, individually and collectively, as we continually face new challenges of injustice.
25. Section 4 offers five **Priorities** for justice. These have emerged from reflection on conversations with Methodists, including global partners, people experiencing injustice and Methodist and other organisations, as well as learning from Scripture, hymnody and our past. Having Priorities does not mean that Methodists or Methodist churches should not campaign or work on other issues that are urgent, important locally or close to people's hearts. Instead it is an attempt to focus our collective voice and resources on a limited number of areas to increase our collective impact, whilst recognising that we will always seek to work ecumenically, and across faiths and wider civil society where we can.
26. Section 5 examines how we participate in transformation in the world, and sets out some key **Practices** or approaches that will increase our effectiveness in being justice-seekers. These involve being with others, being humble in community, using power, seeking transformation, and prayer. These ways of being keep our actions for justice grounded in our faith, staying close both to God and to those who experience injustice. Local Churches are often the locus for people's action, and this section of the report suggests ways in which the report can be embedded to help individuals and churches act justly and create synergy with connexionally-resourced justice work, as well as other networks, groups and coalitions.
27. It is recommended that the Priorities, and if necessary the Principles and Practices, be reviewed every five years to ensure that they still meet the needs of the Methodist Church and the world, through a transparent participative process.
28. The final section makes recommendations for embedding these proposals in the life of the Methodist Church.

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Section 2: Listening and learning

29. The Walking with Micah project has been a journey of learning that has drawn on many sources. Attention to the biblical witness, in its various contexts, and a variety of theological perspectives from across the world have provided key elements and these have been set alongside contemporary writings about justice, our Church's history with issues of justice, personal experience – especially attending to voices not normally heard – and examining justice-seeking practices adopted within and beyond the Church.
30. The following section includes learning from our own history and hymnody, a theology of Methodism and justice, learning from recent justice conversations in churches and current Methodist justice work.

Learning from our history

Justice threads through British Methodist history

31. Learning from our past is not a straightforward business. We need to examine who is telling the story, when, and in what context. History may be written by the 'victors' in a struggle and so may carry attitudes dismissive of others and hide genuine injustices. We like to feel good about ourselves (whoever the 'us' is) and our stories are often told with our own interpretation. British Methodists have, like all, a mixed history of engagement and non-engagement with issues of justice. There are high points of altruism, humility and action for change. There are also low points of misjudgement, apathy, compromise, colonialism and deliberate fault. So rather than attempt a complete narrative of Methodist engagement in justice, this report draws attention to some recurring threads, patterns that help to inform, inspire and warn us.
32. There are 'golden threads' that run through British Methodist history – burnished, tarnished or broken though they may be at times – which might help us understand what is important today, and help us to tell the story of God's love for all people. The following are offered as possible threads:
33. **Commitment to the poorest** – Early Methodism as a mass movement was socially diverse, but had a majority of working people. Wesley famously visited people struggling against poverty and encouraged his societies not only to give to those in need, but also to befriend those experiencing poverty, to understand their story and to challenge both attitudes and economic structures that keep people in poverty. In their best endeavours, this commitment was manifest

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among the Primitive Methodists and in the Forward movement in its work in city and town centres. The Wesley Deaconess Order, founded in 1890, combined social action and evangelism, particularly amongst those at the economic margins. There are accounts of Deaconesses leading work in slums and prisons, and opening homes for women vulnerable to exploitation. Action for Children, All We Can and Methodist Homes were all established as Methodist responses to poverty in different contexts. The Mission Alongside the Poor Affirmation in 1983 stated: *“The Methodist Church, faithful to its missionary calling to evangelism, social caring and political justice, will strive to use its resources for all in society, recognising that this will mean especially taking sides with the poor and disadvantaged.”*⁷

34. **Relationships** – Wesley’s famous comment, *“One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them”*⁸, illustrates the importance put on building relationships directly with those with lived experience of injustice as a driver of justice. For Wesley, the commitment to help those experiencing economic injustice was grounded in genuine encounter with other human beings, and it is from his own experience of ‘being with’ that his exhortations to others to do likewise are based. He told rich followers that they couldn’t be faithful to Christ unless they spent time with the poorest and learned from God amongst them.⁹ Modelling this way of being in radical relationship, enabled his societies, at their best, to be communities committed to sharing their lives together and supporting one another. The suggestion of Captain Foy, an early Methodist in Bristol, that the debt of building the New Room should be met by class members paying a penny a week, rather than relying on donations from those who were wealthy, offered a sense of agency and collaboration. This was combined with Foy’s compassionate commitment to put the penny in himself, if a member had difficulty paying. More recently the work of Sybil Phoenix (a member in the Southwark and Deptford Circuit) exemplifies community-led justice work. She fostered children, and set up the Moonshot youth club for Black young people with classes, a library, dances and a football team, as well as support for young mothers. When the club was burnt down by the National Front, she rebuilt it and later began the first anti-racist training, through MELRAW (Methodist and Ecumenical Leadership Racism Awareness Workshops), for Methodist church leaders. More recently All We Can have modelled partnership working through relief and development work.

7 Methodist Conference Agenda 1987, p. 572

8 ‘On Visiting the Sick, sermon 98’, *The Works of John Wesley*, (Bicentennial ed. vol 3.3), p. 387

9 See ‘John Wesley’s letter to Miss March, 7 February 1776’

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35. **Leadership from the margins** – Wesley’s emphasis on everyone being a child of God and loved by God gave individuals a true sense of their worth – in the words of Charles Wesley’s hymn, God’s “*ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free*” is “*enough for all, enough for each, enough for evermore*”.¹⁰ This does not stop us recognising our failings and inherent sinfulness, but it does help us understand that we are not worthless – even if society judges us to be so. This is transformational. Intentionally and unintentionally, Methodism equipped many people to resist injustices by providing education and nurturing self-worth, strong belief and sometimes righteous anger. Nineteenth century agricultural labourers, for example, learned to speak out and lead in church, and were able to assert their need for a living wage, leading to the founding of the trade union movement. Tommy Hepburn, leader of the first miners’ strike in Durham, and Ellen Wilkinson, one of the first women MPs for the Labour Party and one of the leaders of the Jarrow March, were both nurtured as Methodists. Such leadership was often personally costly, particularly for people from the working classes.
36. **Liberation** – Charles Wesley’s words, “*My chains fell off, my heart was free*”, described his conversion experience in the language of liberation. For many early Methodists, this promised liberation was from the oppression of the spirit, the body and the mind, and had a collective perspective. The Revd Hugh Price Hughes of the West London Mission in the 19th century was at the forefront of both the temperance movement, seeking to liberate people from addiction and poverty, and calls to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act, which sought the liberation of women from abuse and oppression. John Wesley recognised that injustice in 18th-century Britain required both personal and collective action to liberate people. He famously condemned the horrors of slavery, but also said that if the capitalist economy relied on slavery, it was better to abolish the system and the Empire’s wealth than to keep slavery: “*it were more desirable that they [the Caribbean islands] were altogether sunk in the depth of the sea, than that they should be cultivated at so high a price as the violation of justice, mercy and truth.*”¹¹ In 1788, Wesley held a prayer vigil for slaves to escape and break their chains. Methodists, both ordained and lay, and of both African and European heritage, took part in resistance to slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas. This strand of liberation for our global neighbours is echoed in the solidarity which has, at times only partially, been expressed with those experiencing injustice around the world. Methodists in other countries were influential in political liberation movements (eg South Africa and Zambia) and the development of liberation theology (eg Jose Bonino).

10 *Singing the Faith* 438

11 John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, (1774)

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37. **Prophetic witness** – Methodism has nurtured prophetic groups and individuals who have sometimes challenged the Church and society in highlighting injustices. It has acted in solidarity with others for justice, for example in campaigning against the vested interests of slavery, boycotting South African goods, beginning Racial Justice Sunday after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, campaigning to 'Make Poverty History' and promoting fair trade. As a Church, we have sometimes campaigned and occupied risky spaces, until others could join or take things further, for example in exposing the scandalous impact of Benefit Sanctions particularly on disabled people.¹² This tradition of prophetic witness continues through groups such as the Network of Methodist Activists and remains with us through the stories we tell ourselves today, for example, of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Treasuring stories of costly resistance can still inspire us today.
38. **Recognising and owning our church's part in injustices** – In recent years we have begun to acknowledge our failings as a Church, where, looking back, we have got it very wrong. For example, some of our churches were unreceptive and even hostile to the Windrush generation, many of whom came to worship only to be turned away. Likewise, the Methodist Church undertook the Past Cases Review and confessed our part in the failure of the Church to keep people safe from abuse and lasting damage. Furthermore, we have not always been a prophetic counter-cultural voice: the ten years following the 2011 Conference statement, *Hope in God's Future*, saw too little progress on urgent climate action. The Methodist Church has been humbled by the generosity of many of those directly affected but also needs to hear their anger and frustration when recognising and owning our Church's part in injustices. Through the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity work, our Church is beginning to recognise the damage done and to create a truly inclusive culture. Steps are being taken to face the legacies of slavery in our institution and decolonise our work with global partners, for example through the decision to reconstitute the World Mission Fund Grants Committee to enable decisions around priorities and funding to be made by global partner churches rather than British members alone. At our best, we can face the truths of failures because we believe in a God of truth and grace, as well as a God of justice.
39. There will be other threads of justice within Methodist history in Britain. And there will be many examples where our Church failed to be 'at its best'. Yet the resonance of a commitment to the poorest, the importance of relationship, nurturing leadership from the margins, an holistic understanding of liberation, and the role of prophetic witness, as well as a, too often belated, recognition of our

12 jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/Time-to-Rethink-Sanctions-Report.pdf, accessed 6 March 2023

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Church's participation in injustice, help to remind us of what we bring from our heritage – and will help in discerning what is ours to do in the future.

Justice and Methodist hymns

40. As a people 'born in song', we are both formed by the hymns we sing, but also see changes in our understanding reflected in the collections of hymns we authorise for use in Methodist churches.¹³ The notion of justice in our hymnody reaches back to the seminal 1780 hymnbook, *Hymns for the use of the People called Methodist*. Picking up Micah 6:8, Charles Wesley writes:

*Whoe'er to thee themselves approve,
Must take the path thy word hath show'd;
Justice pursue, and mercy love,
And humbly walk by faith with God. (Hymn 127)*

41. The first Methodists would have sung this as they sang their faith. However, the 1780 collection, the defining hymnbook of the early Methodist movement, is structured around the idea of personal salvation and offers hymns for the stages on the journey of faith – what one person called "the Pilgrim's Progress of the 18th century". Although the word justice appears in a number of hymns, it usually refers to God's divine law or final judgement. The word righteousness – a recurring theme in Charles' hymns – which incorporates the notion of justice, tends to mean God's gracious putting right of our individual wrongdoings, another term for personal salvation. Likewise, images of bondage are often metaphors for individual sin rather than systemic injustice. Social justice, though sought by the Wesleys in their ministry, is not a salient feature of these hymns. On the other hand, there are some long-standing hymns that although not mentioning the word 'justice' nonetheless articulate the reign of God's kingdom with material and more equitable improvements to communal life.
42. Over the 20th and especially into the 21st century, the notion of social justice has become more prominent in our hymn books, drawing on a wide range of hymns and songs from communities such as Iona, as well as from Methodist writers. *Singing the Faith* placed 30 hymns and songs on themes of justice and peace in a section entitled 'Of God's Enduring Purposes'. Here, God is described

13 Whilst churches use many other justice hymns and songs, for example those from the Iona Community, this section focuses on those within hymn books that have been authorised for the Methodist Church in Britain.

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as standing beside those experiencing injustice. Graham Kendrick's song 'Beauty for brokenness' (StF 693) portrays God alongside the poor and calls on God to: "give us compassion we pray, melt our cold hearts". The justice spoken of in this hymn is linked to the fulfilment of God's salvation, but the implication is that God's kingdom stands in sharp contrast to the fragility of life for many people, experienced through unemployment, dispossession and conflict. Some hymns, however, assume that the singers themselves have not experienced injustice (eg StF 702 'I will speak out for those who have no voices'). This can lead to divisive 'us' and 'them' language and sentiments, excluding some from being able to sing particular hymns, particularly about poverty, with sincerity.

43. The addition to *Hymns and Psalms* and *Singing the Faith* of material from the global Church has brought emphases of confidence ('Oh Freedom', StF 697), hope ('The right hand of God', StF 715), determination ('Sent by the Lord am I', StF 239) and joy ('We are marching in the light of God', StF 483, and 'We will walk with God', StF 484) to hymns of justice.
44. Overall, there is a growing theme of Christian disciples called into partnership with God in seeking justice. This is expressed in the way of life to which we are called as individuals and together.

*Show me how to stand for justice:
How to work for what is right,
How to challenge false assumptions,
How to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead. (StF 713)*

Justice-seeking through the Methodist Conference

45. The Methodist Conference, as the governing body of the Methodist Church, has adopted statements, received reports, passed resolutions and initiated action on hundreds of justice issues. This section of the report explores how the Conference has acted for justice, and how this has changed over recent years.
46. Some of these have been **formal statements** of the Methodist Conference on specific issues of 'social responsibility'. For example, the Conference produced statements on marriage and divorce in 1946, peace and war in 1957, abortion

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in 1976, and political responsibility in 1995.¹⁴ Whilst many of these formal statements are still a helpful resource, some of them have not stood the test of time. Many need to be read in conjunction with later pieces of work – such as subsequent Conference reports on marriage and relationships, peace and early human life.

47. In 1987, the Conference changed the process for determining what is understood as '**a statement of the Conference**'. The current Standing Order 129 which deals with this is substantially unchanged from the one adopted in that year. The document produced is to be "*a considered Statement of the judgment of the Conference on some major issue or issues of faith and practice, and framed with a view to standing as such for some years.*" In order to ensure that it expresses not just the consensus of the Conference but also of the whole Methodist Church, once the Conference has agreed a draft of the statement it is sent to the Connexion for study, discussion and response. If the response is positive, the Statement may be presented to the Conference for adoption in its original or in some revised form that reflects the comments received.
48. In recent years, only one formal statement has been made on social or political issues – *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* – which was adopted in 2011. This may be because in a rapidly changing world the necessary process of adopting such statements is too lengthy. Similarly, rapidly changing situations mean that it is hard to produce something that will stand "for some years".
49. There have been **reports** to the Conference, notably: *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation* in 2005; *Created in God's Image: An Ecumenical Report on Contemporary Challenges and Principles relating to Early Human Life* in 2008; *Of Equal Value: Poverty and Inequality in the UK* in 2010; and *Drones: Ethical Dilemmas in the Application of Military Force* in 2012. All of these reports were produced ecumenically, usually with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church. Whilst not formal statements of the Methodist Church, they have enabled the Conference to confer on issues of current concern, offering prophetic insight and guidance for engaging with the challenges faced.
50. In addition to statements and formal reports, every year the Methodist Conference receives **Memorials** from Synods and Circuits. These highlight current concerns of Methodist people and some of them raise concerns about

14 The Christian Citizenship Department, the Division of Social Responsibility and later Church and Society often supported the preparation of these statements.

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international or domestic justice issues. The replies from the Conference often affirm previous positions of the Conference, detail action taken on behalf of the Church, and sometimes commit officers of the Conference to certain actions – for example to write to Government ministers. **Notices of Motion** are another route for members of the Conference to raise issues of concern. Notices of Motion reflect a combination of the issues in the news at that time and the passions of some people elected to the Conference. There is often insufficient time or resource to consider these in depth at the Conference and some are therefore referred to the Methodist Council. Often these motions are uncontroversial in that they are in harmony with previous positions taken by the Conference. Occasionally further work is requested by Notices of Motion or memorials. Usually this is limited to writing letters on behalf of the Conference or bringing existing work to the attention of the Church. But there have occasionally been resolutions which have requested the production of resources or reviews or revisions of previous positions, or fuller reports – such as those on drones, early human life, or housing and homelessness.

51. The Methodist Conference has used its voice on issues of justice to support justice activity in the wider Church. Conference resolutions have required representatives of the Church, for example Presidents and Vice-Presidents, to represent the views of the Church to the UK Government or other bodies. They have provided the basis of other pieces of work – for example ethical investment decisions by the Central Finance Board or campaigns on welfare policy led by the Joint Public Issues Team – which are judged to be *“in harmony with the existing statements and resolutions of the Conference”*. Methodists and Local Churches engage with the challenges in various ways. Interest groups have been set up to take forward specific issues, such as the Methodist group on Housing and Homelessness. Individuals have been empowered to represent the position of the Conference in communication with their own elected political representatives, for example in 2016 the Notice of Motion 201(P), *After the Referendum: National Life*, was sent to all MPs and many Methodists followed it up with them in conversation.
52. The Conference’s resolutions on justice issues have been accompanied by an increasing focus on connexionally-enabled campaigning activism. The Conference moved from the clear statements of the decades before the 1990s, to a position where principles are agreed, with a recognition that changing circumstances and a deepening understanding will shape responses. This has developed in tandem with the way in which the Connexional Team has been structured to support the Conference in its justice work. The Methodist Church has moved from having Connexional Secretaries with responsibility for areas of work within a Department of Christian Citizenship, or the Division of Social

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Responsibility or Church and Society, to being part of the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) which, for Methodism, sits within the Mission Team.

53. JPIT carries forward the wishes of the Methodist Conference together with the governance bodies of the other member denominations. As well as enabling Churches to speak to national institutions, it has developed thematic popular campaigns using theological resources and previous statements or resolutions of the Conference. Significant campaigns include Truth and Lies about Poverty, Benefit Sanctions, Reset the Debt, the Nuclear Weapons Ban and campaigns around the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.
54. Methodists have long been involved in campaigning – many remember the campaigns of MAYC as shaping their faith and awareness of justice. Campaigns carried out in the name of the Methodist Church can be deeply formative for us as a Church. Based on deeply held beliefs, they surface those beliefs in practical ways and help shape our sense of what our beliefs mean for our way of life. The *Truth and Lies* campaign is a good example of this. Receiving a lot of publicity, it enabled the Church to challenge a vindictive narrative about people living in poverty, and also enabled Methodists to engage with people in different ways. Whilst we often seek out collaborative partners, Methodist Church's campaigns for justice can sometimes be at their best when they respond to a call to the margins, holding a risky prophetic space, occupying it until it becomes the norm, before handing it onto others. *Reset the Debt* kept the impact of household debt in front of decision-makers for 18 months, and others in the field have now launched their own campaigns. Yet whilst campaigning and advocacy is important, resolutions of the Conference can also be acted upon through other forms of community-based activism.¹⁵
55. There are, however, limitations connected with the ways of working described.
56. Firstly, the Methodist Conference only has a limited time for business. This means that the time given to consideration of justice issues, particularly when it is in the form of Memorials or Notices of Motion, is also limited. Significant issues can be delegated to the Methodist Council or passed with little discussion. Yet the Conference can and often does engage in deep conferring – self-conscious talking and listening in the presence of the Holy Spirit – drawing on wisdom and resources from around the Connexion. In recent years the use of workshops has helped to develop work on major issues. Similarly, there has been

15 Recent examples would include engaging with the Churches of Sanctuary Movement and the Homes for Ukraine programme, both supported at the Methodist Conference in 2022.

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benefit in having two debates on separate days when dealing with an important report: the first to discuss the overall content and principles, and the second to deal with the detailed resolutions connected to it. Given the right process and purpose, deliberate conferring enables the Church's engagement with justice issues to be deepened.

57. Secondly, whilst the Methodist Conference speaks for the Methodist Church, it does not represent the views of all people who are part of Methodist communities on all issues. Members of the Connexional Team, speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church, are careful to refer to statements made in the name of the Presidency, resolutions passed by the Conference, or the views of "many Methodists". Very rarely has the Conference indicated that views are unarguable. SO 336(1), which states that "racism is a denial of the gospel" is one, and perhaps *Hope in God's Future's* assertion that "it is now morally irresponsible to fail to act on . . . our current situation" gives a clear position on inaction on the climate crisis. Whilst Methodists will sometimes hold opposing positions on how issues of injustice should be understood or resolved, this doesn't mean that every position is acceptable or should go unchallenged, nor does complexity require us to be neutral. The Principles proposed in Section 3 of the report offer a way of anchoring us all in a vision of God's justice, from which we can seek our own vocation for justice, and ensure that the Methodist Church has an articulated basis for public engagement.

Learning from the Bible and our theology

Theological definitions of justice

58. We begin this theology of justice by reflecting on the nature of God. One of the most fundamental ways in which we understand that nature is as love. Justice is the outworking of love in the public domain and as such is an expression of God's nature; justice characterises God's interaction with God's world and God's people. Such justice may not always be comfortable, or easily intelligible, and humans may not always have fully recognised, followed or understood it, but this does not negate the value of the exploration.
59. There are many strands in the Christian tradition that can contribute to a theology of justice. These include the following approaches:
- a. **Creation-based:** Justice is where all is held in a godly balance, in a world that is good; this means that a creation-based vision of justice extends beyond the human, calling us to a responsible and caring relationship of interdependence

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with the whole created order. Justice is done when we love, appreciate and care for creation as God's precious gift, which we hold in trust. This understanding would take, as its starting point for human relations, the *imago Dei*; a just society is one in which the image of God is recognised in all people, and all are treated as such. Equally, it is one where all live as those proud to bear the image of God.

- b. Incarnation-based:** God was fully present in the person of Jesus Christ, and chooses to be present through the followers of Christ in the messiness of everyday life. Justice may be a form of *kenosis*, or self-emptying. Too often, this is unequally expected of certain (often already marginalised) groups, but when we all give of ourselves freely for others, surrendering the privilege that we hold, the imbalance of power which leads to injustice gives way to a commitment to the good of the other. Paradoxically, this self-emptying leads to a society in which all can be fulfilled. Irenaeus of Lyons reminds us that Christ "became what we are so that we may become what he is,"¹⁶ and Mary sings that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." (Luke 1:52, NRSVA)
- c. Salvation-based:** Justice is shaped by the cross, showing that evil will not be victorious and offering new life for all things in Jesus. Like the passion narrative itself, a salvation-based understanding of justice draws on the imagery and theology of the Exodus. Justice is liberation, which comes not without pain and not without risk. It seeks to overcome exploitation and inequality, but also the subtler forms of oppression that limit people's ability to shape and live their lives freely. It emerges into the light, reborn and renewed, but, like the risen Christ, those who have fought for justice will bear the scars. Yet there is some moral complexity in the Exodus narrative, with the liberation of the people of Israel being accompanied by the deaths of the Egyptian army in the waters. Perhaps, though, it does at least show that in various ways injustice costs the oppressors as well as the oppressed.
- d. Kingdom-based:** In the life of Israel, in the ministry of Jesus, and in the life of the early Church, the Bible bears witness to another way of being, where God's kingdom comes and God's will is done. It also, of course, bears witness to the damage done where this is not the case. The lived experience of God's people, in both Testaments and throughout history, leads to an understanding of what justice – and injustice – feels like. Justice is inherently relational and community-based and reflects *koinonia*, the deep and loving fellowship that is made possible through the Holy Spirit.

60. In our theological reflections, we will often and rightly draw on more than one of these approaches.

16 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, book 5, Preface

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Justice as Our Calling

61. If justice finds its source in our understanding of God, particularly as seen in the ministry of Jesus Christ, then it must surely be a part of our calling as God's people. If discipleship is about learning to be more Christ-like, we cannot avoid the task of seeking to be more just. To believe in a just God is to believe in justice as godliness, and to believe is to act. The Epistle of James declares that "faith without works is dead" (2:26, *NRSVA*) – this is not a neat soundbite, but a summary of a much longer call to let justice and love characterise our community of faith.
62. Justice describes the way in which God relates to us, so it must also be central to how we relate to God (Worship) and to one another (Learning and Caring), to how we are Christ-like in the world (Service), and indeed to the very nature of the good news that we proclaim (Evangelism). Justice is not an optional add-on, or a piece of work that we can delegate to a committee, but is central to what it means to be a disciple.

A Methodist theology of justice-seeking

63. There is nothing in the above that is uniquely Methodist: if justice is an outworking of love, and love is the nature of God, then to be Christian must be to seek justice. But perhaps there is a distinctively – although still not uniquely – Methodist theological approach to seeking justice.
64. Methodism places considerable value on the ideas of sanctification and holiness. For John Wesley holiness is about a fullness (even perfection) of love for God and for neighbour. Living out love in the real world, however, can be messy and complicated; it can involve difficult ethical decisions and engagement with those who may not share our values. But it has the potential to transform both us and the world around us. The Bible shows us a God who is intimately connected with, and concerned for, God's creation – a God who takes an interest in the orphan and the widow, who is concerned for the stranger, and who actually chose to live as part of creation, in Jesus, who was not afraid to get his holy hands dirty, before nails were driven through them. And we are called to be holy, just as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16, recalling Leviticus 11:45). For Methodists, holiness is intertwined with an understanding of justice.
65. Methodists have historically placed a considerable emphasis on **experience** in theology. So it might be appropriate to draw on our understanding from our individual and community experience of justice.

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66. In practice, this may often begin with what *injustice* feels like. We may be more aware of our perception of when God's rule is *not* experienced, when situations are unfair or oppressive. This could be seen as a theology that begins with the Fall, but is perhaps more concerned with redemption. We might begin with eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, but perhaps we need to have our eyes opened to injustice to which we might otherwise remain oblivious. Walter Brueggemann, in *The Prophetic Imagination*, argues that, confronted with oppressive systems, before we can seek change, we must first learn to lament the way things are. This means allowing ourselves to be awakened to situations of injustice until, understanding fully, we can do no other but lament. Then we will be ready to join the struggle for justice, not because we think we should, or because it will count to our credit, but because we cannot bear the injustice.
67. It is easy to see why the Hebrew slaves in Egypt might lament, but we may not be those Hebrews; we may even be the ordinary Egyptians, who are not driving the slaves but who benefit from their labour. How, then, are we to reach the point of lament and the urge for justice? The answer must involve a great deal of careful listening and empathy. The starting point for our Methodist theology of justice may not be our own experience, but that of others. This can be difficult and uncomfortable, but may drive us to repentance, to lament and thus to action, and so our discipleship may be enriched.
68. If our theological explorations often begin with experience, we soon find ourselves turning to **Scripture** in order to make sense of what we have experienced, to allow Scripture to read our experience and challenge it. The scriptural potential for a reflection on justice is vast and complex, and cannot be adequately dealt with here, but it is worth noting that it is not a discrete category. Firstly, it is itself in part about experience; the narratives contained within the Bible describe the experience of God's people in seeking – and often failing – to live according to God's justice. Secondly, the theological themes already outlined are themselves profoundly biblical, and the biblical witness shapes our theology and our interpretation of our experience.
69. It is also important to note that the Bible does not present one uniform picture of justice, and that there are some very problematic examples of how justice can appear very different from different perspectives. We tend to turn to the prophets (Micah among them) for a call to justice, but what are we to do with the cry of desperation at the end of Psalm 137, where the heartbroken, exiled Hebrews can find no other way to express their experience of injustice than by longing for the destruction of even the babies of their oppressors?
70. In exploring our experiences and those that we read about in Scripture, we naturally find ourselves applying **reason** to determine the underlying principles of

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justice and how they appear, or are missing, in our lives and communities today. We do this as individuals and in conference with one another, by reflecting on our individual and collective experience, and the experiences of others. We do this in order to include the widest possible range of voices, thus ensuring that the conferring itself is done justly. We recognise that sometimes these voices will disagree. As with the biblical narrative, justice looks different from different perspectives.

71. The act of conferring also allows us to discern together, not just where injustice is to be found, but also how and where to prioritise our focus as a justice-seeking church. It allows us to respond to injustice at a very local level, within each community and context, and to work with our partner churches around the world to challenge oppression and injustice internationally and globally. This does not, however, release us from the obligation to identify and challenge injustice as individuals, nor to examine our own lives for those attitudes and actions that deny the image of God in our neighbours.
72. As we reflect together on our experience and interpret the Bible with each other, we build on that collective experience that we call **tradition**. Our traditions, which are often so central to our lives and worship that we may not even notice them, arise from our experience and our sense of self-identity. We stand in a tradition of seeking justice and equality; this is seen in our history and dissenting traditions, our hymnody, our preaching, our Wesleyan heritage and doctrines. There is much here of which we can be rightly proud.
73. Again, however, we need to be attentive to the widest possible range of voices. We are part of a global Wesleyan family, and part of the Church catholic; we are also citizens of a world with a vast range of religious, cultural and linguistic traditions and a huge diversity of experience. The traditions and history of other parts of the global Methodist and other Christian communities, as well as non-Christian communities, have also shaped our own traditions. The development of Liberation Theology, Black Theology, women's and LGBTQ theologies, Urban Theology, and other liberationist approaches have enabled a deeper understanding, bringing the perspectives of marginalised communities to theological interpretation. Attention to these perspectives helps us to recognise the less constructive aspects of the history of our Church and communities, and to understand where we have colluded – and often may still collude – with inequality, injustice and oppression.
74. All of this requires a collective process of listening. We need to hear those whose experience of injustice is not ours; the reasoning of those whose understanding of justice is not ours; interpretations of Scripture that challenge our own reading; and the perspectives of those shaped in different traditions from ours. The search

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for justice is not tidy, and a theology of justice is therefore hard to systematise. Rather, we weave together the various theological strands in ever new ways, for new situations, as we listen to and confer with one another.

Learning from conversations

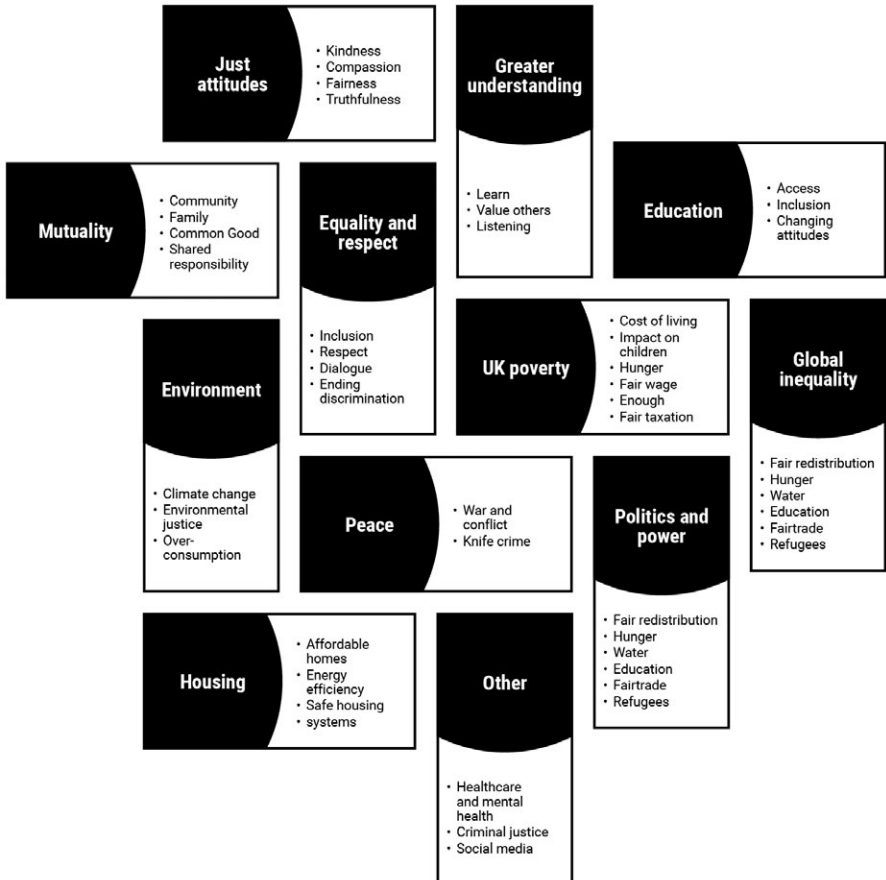
75. A major contribution to the project has been the **Justice Conversations**. This was a participatory method through which people were invited to learn through dialogue with others, and then share the fruits of what they had observed or discovered. These were conversations not consultations. The feedback indicates the breadth of concerns amongst Methodist groups and communities, and is used alongside the other sources of information indicated in this section of the report.
76. Across the Connexion, people were invited to consider together three questions as part of Justice Conversations:
 - Imagine a fair, more equal and life-bringing society and world . . . what does that look like?
 - What's the biggest obstacle to such a just world?
 - What is the most important step in making this a reality?
77. Groups were offered resources to look at these questions through the lens of Bible studies, worship, discussion groups, craftivism or intergenerational conversation. They fed back their responses through a web portal or on postcards. Some Synods and Methodist schools also took part, as did children and young people at 3Generate and deacons at Convocation.
78. Many of these responses came from groups who were aware of what was happening in their local communities and were committed to working for change. Groups that fed back through the web portal gave some information about themselves, for example:
 - *We are a community hub and the only such facility in the locality.*
 - *[We] collect a weekly delivery of vegetables from farmer for homeless ministry.*
 - *We are a church with no building. We have a piece of land leased . . . where we grow produce to share within the community through the town's community fridge which is part of the community climate emergency group.*
 - *We have recently started a Peace and Justice group called 'A Piece of Justice' which uses the Craftivist approach to activism.*
 - *Average congregation 15+; a registered fair-trade church, bronze eco church, two weekly coffee mornings – one primarily for elderly/isolated/mental health, one a free café with benefit/welfare advisor, a monthly free Sunday lunch for the community.*

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79. Whilst there was recognition that Covid-19 had changed or paused activities undertaken by churches, two thirds of churches that responded were involved in foodbanks, and a third were involved in supporting refugees, fair trade or community campaigns.
80. Groups with personal experiences of injustice were also invited to hold panels or discussions, and fed back their perspective, for example on poverty, youth, racial injustice, disability and gender. Whilst the intent was to respond to the commitment that this project should reflect the maxim of many rights groups, 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us', we recognise the inherent limitations of this process. Not all perspectives were represented. We heard that sometimes people are too tired or busy to repeatedly share their stories. Sometimes people's experiences of injustice within the Church meant that their lens focused on the Church and the changes needed within it, which demonstrated the importance of the link between this project and the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy.
81. A workshop was held with partner churches and partnership coordinators at the Pre-Conference Consultation, and there was feedback from the Global Relations conversation process with partner churches facilitated by Regional Ecumenical Advisory and Service Centre in Latin America (CREAS), as well as a conversation facilitated by All We Can.
82. Finally conversations were held with a range of Methodist organisations and networks about their Priorities for justice. These included MHA, the Methodist City Centre Network the Central Finance Board, All We Can, the Fund for Human Need and the Network of Methodist Activists. Some of these organisations have clear priorities for changes to public policy, others are responding to need or enabling engagement with justice. All of them carry some Methodist history and identity in terms of our response to injustice.
83. These various conversations did not provide an overriding issue or single call for change. Instead themes have emerged, from groups' images of a just world and their priorities for action, together with advice from JPIT and others on issues that are below the horizon. These themes were tested in workshops at the Conference of 2022. Responses from members of the Conference were fed back into the discernment process and brought into conversation with the other sources.
84. The aim throughout has been to listen across a wide range of voices and to discern what could help us be a better justice-seeking church. These conversations have shaped the Principles and Priorities proposed in later sections, and also given an insight into how our church practises justice-seeking.

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85. The graphic below is just an illustration of some of the lenses for justice that emerged in the Justice Conversations. Whilst presented in themes, the issues they represent are of course woven together in far greater complexity. Migration cannot be separated from the climate crisis, and housing is embedded in poverty in the UK. Similarly, because of the ways in which the conversations were structured, this graphic captures a representation of people's concerns about injustices to be tackled, visions of justice and means of achieving that justice. No weighting is attempted; rather this graphic gives a flavour of the themes emerging from the conversations held.



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Learning from current Methodist practice

86. The Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) currently speaks, funds, works, learns and prays on and about many justice issues, via Local Churches and Circuits, informal networks, senior leaders, grassroots activists and in partnership with others. In particular, MCB often works in partnership with other Methodist-founded organisations, including Action for Children, All We Can, the Fund for Human Need, MHA and more. There is also a large number of other organisations with which the Methodist Church and people have a long history of collaborating, including Christian Aid, the Fairtrade Foundation, A Rocha and more. Alongside these established groups are grassroots networks of individuals involved in justice work, including the Methodist Peace Fellowship, Methodist Women in Britain, Methodists for World Mission, the Methodist Zero Carbon Group and the Network of Methodist Activists. Many Methodists offer prayer, money and time to these organisations and groups.
87. Methodists often seek to undertake justice holistically – praying, learning, speaking, funding and working simultaneously – so these practices overlap and support one another. However, for simplicity, our current justice work is outlined below under three broad headings – speaking, funding and working.
88. **Speaking for justice** is undertaken most prominently by the representatives from Methodism's large annual gatherings – the Conference and 3Generate (the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly). Each year, the Conference elects a President and Vice-President, who often choose a theme for the year to speak out on. Many recent themes have reflected issues of justice, including, 'The Greatest Commandment' (love your neighbour) and 'A Place for All' (equality and inclusion). In addition to their theme, the President and Vice-President often speak on behalf of the Methodist Church and alongside others on current affairs and urgent issues of justice, often supported by the Joint Public Issues Team. 3Generate has regularly exercised its prophetic voice in highlighting justice issues, usually via the elected Youth President or Youth Representatives. In recent years, this has included environmental issues, homelessness, Black Lives Matter, and poverty in the UK. Social media has enabled Methodists at all levels to speak for justice on a broad and public platform.
89. Preachers engage with justice in the Bible and in the world on a weekly basis as they prepare to lead worship. Ministerial formation at Queen's includes a centring of liberation approaches, a mandatory module on Black and Asian theologies, and compulsory training in community-based engagement and mission.

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90. **Funding for justice** happens globally, connexionally and locally.

- **Globally:** The World Mission Fund (WMF) finances projects and work overseas in co-operation with the Methodist Church in Britain's global partner churches and organisations; this including projects focused on evangelism, mission work, schools, hospitals, environmental action, emergency situations, administration, training and much more. Recent examples of justice work include supporting the work of the Methodist Church in Tanzania in challenging attitudes toward those living with disabilities, and the work of Mediterranean Hope, through a mission partner working in advocacy for migrants and the creation of humanitarian corridors for those seeking refuge. In addition, MCB regularly fundraises for areas of high need in response to events around the world, such as the 2022 Sri Lanka appeal, and the appeals for Ukraine in 2022 and Haiti in 2021 – both of which were held jointly with All We Can.
- **Connexionally:** The Mission in Britain (MiB) Fund finances projects and work in the UK. Every Circuit and every District in the Connexion has been allocated MiB funds for one or more New Places for New People (NPNP) projects. Across the Connexion, at least 60 per cent of NPNP funding will be used for Church at the Margins projects. The vision for Church at the Margins is to nurture new Christian communities and leadership amongst economically marginalised people in new places.
- **Locally:** £250,000 of Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ) funding, which comes from the MiB Fund, is distributed to the Districts each year, for use according to local Priorities, within the purposes defined in Standing Order 1004 (focusing closely on advocating for and supporting those experiencing poverty), along with money from District Advance Funds.

91. **Working for justice** is led at a connexional level by the Joint Public Issues Team, where the Methodist Church works in close partnership with the Baptist Union and United Reformed Church, with the Church of Scotland as an associate partner. This work has in recent years been shaped by 'Six Hopes for Society': a just economy that enables the flourishing of all life; a society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre; a world that actively works for peace; a planet where our environment is renewed; a society that welcomes the stranger; and a politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness. The work is focused on research, engagement, advocacy and campaigning, and the creation of resources for reflection, discussion and worship around these six hopes. Within the Children Youth and Families Team, the Agents of Change programme

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has supported, and continues to encourage activism, volunteering, campaigning, peace-making and project-starting amongst children and young people.

92. In addition to this ongoing work, short-term projects are undertaken in response to need, including recruiting COP26 Campaign Workers to mobilise the Methodist Church globally in calling for action on the climate crisis during the COP26, launching the Warm Spaces project in response to steep increases in energy bills and the cost of living crisis, and partnering with Citizens UK to support the Communities for Ukraine programme. Justice is also woven into work across the Methodist Church, including the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy, the God for All Strategy, Rural Mission and Ministry, the aims and purpose of 3Generate, the work of Safeguarding, the Action for Hope Strategy and in many other ways.
93. **Working for justice** is led at a local level by churches, Circuits and Districts, which undertake justice work tailored to their own contexts and funded locally.
94. Local Churches bring many gifts. Churches desire to reflect the character of God, not to develop the power of an organisation, and are sustained by prayer and spirituality. Churches are often an enduring presence within communities, with a shared memory of change and the long-term impact of injustices, as well as relationships sometimes over generations, with members of communities. Churches' experience of pastoral care and listening means that they are not naive about the 'messiness of life' and therefore know that seeking transformation and justice can be complex, and requires persistence and often small steps. Collectively, if not always locally, churches are intergenerational and diverse, contextual and part of a global community. They are able to explore issues of justice and transformation across a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Churches can nurture leadership from the margins of societies, and children and young people inspire and initiate justice in their communities and the wider church. Christian discipleship includes the call to be a prophetic community; a people who recognise the reality of the world as it is, and who yet look towards, and invite others to look towards, the world as it should be.
95. Yet churches also face challenges in being justice-seeking presences in communities. Many of these challenges – a shortage of funding or volunteers, an increase in demand and a lack of certainty – face other charities or other voluntary organisations. The increasingly middle class demographic of many churches means that they are often disconnected from those with lived experience of injustice. There is a sense that there are fewer people within our churches able to engage with certain forms of justice-seeking and action. For

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those who are engaging, there is a risk of being overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of injustices. In the wake of the pandemic, many congregations experience a continuing sense of being in liminal, or 'in between' times, trying to discern how to hold on to the treasures of the past, to set aside the things which no longer work, and to be open to new ways of seeking justice and peace.

96. No large-scale surveying or research has been done into local church justice work, and so the scale and types of work undertaken across the Connexion remains relatively unknown. But it is clear that the areas of work that many churches are involved in include (but are not limited to): hosting foodbanks or pantries and debt advice centres; supporting people facing homelessness, drug addiction, poverty or discrimination; becoming EcoChurches or Churches of Sanctuary; hosting election hustings meetings; or being involved in campaigning or community organising groups. In addition, some diaconal and presbyteral appointments and lay worker roles have a particular emphasis on justice issues and civic or political engagement. Finally, it is important to remember that Methodist people are often involved in justice work beyond their church community, including in paid employment or voluntary work. The role of churches in inspiring such work through preaching or upholding it in prayer is crucial.
97. Across the Methodist engagement in justice outlined above, the themes that emerge most commonly in the current practice are poverty, equality, environment, global issues and asylum/migration. Less common themes which are also present include peace, a just economy and political engagement.

Key approaches to justice-seeking

98. Through conversations, and reflections on our theology, tradition and practice, it has become apparent that there are some ways of being that enable us to be 'at our best' when we are seeking justice:
- **Being with** – justice is about 'being with' people rather than 'working for' people.
 - **Humility in community** – recognising when we get things wrong, that we can grow and learn, that churches are not the most significant players, and that we must collaborate.
 - **Power** – we need to recognise where power lies and who is denied power, and how to use our own power

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- **Transformation** – justice is not only about responding to someone’s immediate needs, but also transforming the deep or structural injustices that cause those needs.
- **Prayer** – activism for justice needs to be rooted in and sustained by our relationship with the God of justice

99. These are key assumptions about ‘ways of being’ that we believe underpin a Methodist approach to justice, and are developed further in Section 5.

Section 3: Principles for justice

Introducing the Principles for justice

100. The **Principles** for justice are anchored in what we know of our just God, and suggest what this means for us to be justice-seeking.
101. Many Christian Churches have a tradition of social principles or a body of theological teaching on justice.¹⁷
102. The Catholic Church, for example, has a body of Catholic Social Teaching that originated in modern times in 1891 with the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. Since then, new encyclicals, such as Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* on the environment and *Fratelli Tutti* on solidarity, have refined the Church’s teaching and shaped its response to the modern world. The Catholic aid agency CAFOD summarises the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching as: dignity; solidarity; the common good; the option for the poor; peace; care for creation; and the dignity of work and participation.¹⁸
103. The worldwide Anglican Communion produces material to support ‘Five Marks of Mission’, the third, fourth and fifth of which are “To respond to human need by loving service”, “To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation” and “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth”.¹⁹ The World Communion of Reformed Churches engages in extensive teaching

17 See Malcolm Brown (ed), *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision today* (Church House Publishing, 2014) for discussion of different traditions

18 cafod.org.uk/Pray/Catholic-social-teaching, accessed 6 March 2023

19 anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.asp, accessed 6 March 2023

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and campaigning on justice, including the 2004 Accra Confession on economic and environmental justice.²⁰ The Baptist World Alliance has a Commission on Racial, Gender and Economic Justice and several other Commissions as part of a Religious Freedom, Human Rights, and Justice Network.²¹ *Quaker Faith and Practice* is a collection of witness and wisdom, consisting of extracts and quotes, reflecting the breadth of Quaker theology. As well as describing Quaker governance, it offers testimonies on social responsibility and peace.

104. The World Methodist Council has a social justice committee with a current focus on economic justice or injustice, and has approved a 'World Methodist Social Affirmation'.²² The United Methodist Church (UMC)²³ has a series of Social Principles, beginning with an affirmation of faith from which detailed position statements follow, speaking *"to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation . . . They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit."* The General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church has been through a process, over a number of years, and involving hundreds of people from around the Church globally, to develop proposed new Social Principles that will come to the next UMC General Conference.
105. Other partner churches have similarly developed theological approaches to current human or global challenges, for example the Pacific Churches on 'Re-weaving the ecological mat' or the theological statements of the Methodist Church in Cuba on children and the family.
106. As shown in section 2 the British Methodist Conference has made theological statements related to specific social or justice issues, and from these have been developed positions or activities.
107. What is offered to the Conference through these Principles for justice is different. We recommend the adoption of six simple Principles, developed through listening, conversations and with accompaniers from the Faith and Order Committee. These Principles offer a description of what underpins our beliefs, for us as Methodists, about a God of justice. Each is followed by what this principle means for us if we are to be justice-seeking. Whilst these Principles will be recognised by many Christians, they are proposed humbly as emerging from our own reception of scripture, experience, tradition and reason.

20 wrc.ch/resources/justice, accessed 6 March 2023

21 baptistworld.org/commissions, accessed 6 March 2023

22 worldmethodistcouncil.org/social-international-affairs, accessed 6 March 2023

23 The United Methodist Church is a global Methodist Church based in the United States of America.

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108. We recommend the adoption of these Principles for justice:

- God made humans in the image of God, each worthy of equal value and dignity. *The search for justice entails treating others with respect, and may involve reclaiming lost worth.*
- God desires the flourishing of creation and human community within it. *The search for justice does not diminish or limit the flourishing of others but seeks to enable it.*
- God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. *The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty, and those who are marginalised in other ways, as a priority.*
- God entrusts those in power with a special responsibility for upholding justice. *Those seeking justice will encourage and challenge those with power to fulfil their vocation.*
- God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice, liberation and transformation. *It is never just someone else's responsibility. We all have a part to play.*
- God calls us to live in hope and in ways that reflect God's character and the pattern of God's kingdom. *Thus, seeking justice involves honesty and truth, and may demand protest and resistance, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation.*

What are the Principles for?

109. The hope behind these Principles is three-fold. Firstly, in turbulent times, these Principles are anchored in what we understand of God's just character. They are not a panacea, telling us everything we need to think or know in every situation. They do not mean that we no longer need to think, pray, or confer with each other. Instead the Principles are a powerful expression of what keeps us rooted as we wrestle with situations of injustice.
110. Secondly, the hope is that that these Principles will help us to articulate our call to justice, both inside and beyond the Methodist Church, in ways that are clear and compelling.
111. Thirdly, the hope is that the Principles will be tools to support discernment, individually and collectively, as we continually face new challenges of injustice. Supported by the deeper reflections below, they will be a resource for us – as members, as Church leaders, as groups such as JPIT or the Central Finance Board – when we are called to respond in word or action to specific issues. If these are agreed by the Conference, the intention is to provide materials, such as

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Bible study or small group resources and toolkits, to enable Methodists to engage with them.

112. There may be times when one of the Principles might speak more to us than others. However, they should not be cherry-picked. Instead they should work in dialogue one with another, and that interaction should help us to go deeper.
113. Above all the Principles are not to be received passively. They are for us to work out in community with each other, together, through our discipleship and discernment, as part of our vocation for justice in this time and place. Our engagement with the Principles comprises part of our accountability to each other as well as to God.
114. At the core of these Principles is God's love. John Wesley recognised that love was the most important gift and motivator. In his sermon on The Catholic Spirit he wrote, "*Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.*"²⁴ Adopting these Principles does not mean that Methodists will all have to agree on each issue or vote the same way in every election. We have different lenses and experiences of justice and injustice, as well as different political ideologies. Methodists have represented most mainstream parties in elected assemblies. But we can be united in the acceptance of the Principles, even if we do not yet fully agree over their application.
115. There are however some positions that cross "*the limits of acceptable political ideology, beyond which Christian sympathy must be withdrawn because our understanding of God is contradicted (eg apartheid, or the National Front).*"²⁵ The Principles do not themselves draw such lines, but will help in the identification of ideologies, policies or behaviours that are unacceptable.
116. In the end we must recall, as the Methodist Statement on Political Responsibility (1995) reminds us, that however earnest, our efforts for justice will only ever be human and a proximate picture of God's justice:

"the Christian community must face honestly its historical record. It is clear that the power of sin remains ever present in the church as in creation

24 'Catholic Spirit, sermon 39', *The Works of John Wesley*, (Bicentennial ed. vol 2.4) p. 82

25 The Methodist Statement on Political Responsibility 1995. This is reflected in SO 013B, and the requirement of SO 050 that preparation for candidates for membership shall include "an introduction to the doctrines, discipline and formal statements of the Methodist Church, including its belief that racism is a denial of the gospel".

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as a whole. It infects all relationships and social structures, distorting perception and breeding corruption, oppression, arrogance and unbridled selfishness. No political programme, therefore, can be equated with the coming kingdom of God."

Going deeper with the Principles

God made humans in the image of God, each worthy of equal value and dignity. *The search for justice entails treating others with respect, and may involve reclaiming lost worth.*

117. From the very beginning, the 'image of God' is embedded into the biblical story as a key way of describing human identity. Genesis 1:26-27 tells us three times that humanity is formed in God's image; then God blesses this new, human creation and declares it to be good.
118. It is also significant that diversity is an inherent part of this identity; God creates humankind "in the image of God" (v.27). It is not a particular people, gender, ability, ethnicity or social status that is created to bear the divine image, but all humankind.
119. To recognise this image in all humans is inherently to treat all people with equal (and utmost) dignity and of equal (the highest) value. Anything else is a distortion of our relationship with God, or what we call 'sin'. To elevate some is to find ourselves recasting our understanding of God in the image of some people. To reduce others to a lesser status is to treat God's image as unworthy of respect. The first outcome is idolatry, the second is a failure to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength.
120. If, then, our identity as the image of God is part of God's good creation, our failure to recognise that image in others – or to treat people as being of unequal worth – is a consequence of the Fall. That is, it is an example of our human tendency to idolise our own ideas about God, and to limit the scope of God's grace. The consequences of this are not limited to individual relationships; to fail to see the image of God in others results in the image of God being less clear in us. It is to act as though not only the 'other', but also we ourselves, are not bearers of God's image.
121. In Jesus, we see the truest image of God, remaining faithful to that image and recognising it in others. We see him restore worth to those considered worthless and take time to engage with humanity that bears the imprint of Godself. And we

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see Jesus treated as of no worth, executed in pain and humiliation on the cross, God's ultimate defeat of that which is evil and the promise of new life and new creation. And so the cross – a symbol of the human capacity for inhumanity – becomes instead a symbol of a new way of being, in which, through loving our neighbour as ourselves, the image of God can be seen more clearly in us, and our worth can be restored.

God desires the flourishing of creation and human community within it. The search for justice does not diminish or limit the flourishing of others but seeks to enable it.

122. Creation is intrinsically good and God delights in it. Human beings are the focal point of the biblical account of creation in the book of Genesis (chapters 1, 2) but all creation is interdependent. People are 'made for each other' (Genesis 2:18) yet this cannot occur without the wider flourishing of the created order that includes all living things and the global ecosystem.
123. Flourishing means the maximal development of one's potential and capabilities, the greatest use of the gifts we are all given. It is about having enough in order to thrive; the ability to live a good life, one that is meaningful and satisfying. It is not the same as the freedom to do whatever one likes, but flourishing is about that environment which enables our greatest potential to be reached, individually and collectively. It does not suggest that we all have the same potential, but that we are of equal worth in the sight of God. Each one of us is uniquely gifted and has our own distinctive contribution to make. Theologically, the concept of the good life includes work and rest, as well as pursuits that are creative and allow free self-expression. Flourishing is about exploring and co-creating God's world, and discovering these to be satisfying and enriching experiences. However the waste or exploitation of God's gifts is not only sin against God but represents an injustice against others.
124. The flourishing of creation needs to be understood carefully. Humanity is an integral part of God's created order. Creation's beauty, diversity, complexity and variety of species are consequences of its flourishing, not the goal of it. All living things are one whole, and the destruction of one part (a habitat or a species) will often have serious implications for many others, in ways often unforeseeable.
125. The flourishing of creation describes a situation in which the present and future of human beings and all living things are secured, in ways that respect the delicate balance between creature and environment.
126. In principle, no one aspect of justice is more important than any other, and ideally the pursuit of one form of justice should not impair the advancement of any

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other nor lead to the diminishing of anyone. Justice, flourishing and diversity are all linked. In practice, however, we will always wrestle with competing priorities due to finitude and scarcity, but in the search for justice we should always guard against the creation of injustices elsewhere. Yet not all loss is injustice. The achievement of justice can be costly for those who seek it, and it can involve loss of privilege or reparations to those who have suffered. But only in the narrowest of interpretations can this be considered loss, for the gains far outweigh these, and open up possibilities of greater reconciliation, healing, peace and security for all, rather than for some.

127. Justice will always enhance flourishing. It may place constraints on certain activities – but only on those that create unjust outcomes, and thus would restrict the flourishing of others: neighbours and strangers in the future as well as the present.

God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. *The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty, and those who are marginalised in other ways, as a priority.*

128. The Bible reveals the infinite quality of divine love, so it becomes meaningless to compare God's love between peoples. And yet the focus on God's bias to people experiencing poverty points to the Bible's revelation of God's chosen paradigm for living together in God-centred, justice-focused community. God requires us to share God's greater attention to those in poverty, because they suffer due to the structural injustices in the shape and values of society as a whole, and which is skewed toward those with wealth. Moreover, their voices often go unheard.
129. God engages with Abraham so that he may channel blessing 'to all the families of the earth' (Genesis 12:3). Torah consistently highlights the need for Israel to remember its universal calling. The instruction to care for widows, aliens and orphans (Deuteronomy 24:19-21, cf Ruth 2:2) sits alongside teaching about debt relief (Leviticus 25) and tithing to relieve poverty (Deuteronomy 14:28). The prophets condemn behaviours which abuse power (Amos 5:11, Isaiah 1:17) and encourage their communities to develop their own strategies to resist oppression (Micah 4:3-4).
130. The New Testament picks up the same themes. John the Baptist advocates radical sharing with "the poor" (Luke 3:11). Paul encourages his congregations to give generously to his collection for those in need (Romans 15:26). James heavily criticises those who treat rich visitors differently from poor ones (James 1:1-7). The Gospels remind us that Jesus was not born with wealth or status. His teaching balances realism – "you always have the poor with you" (Matthew 26:11)

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– with radical, visionary hope. He insists that people use their resources to benefit others in need (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 16:19-30, 19:1-10), and envisions banquets where the guests are the most marginalised (Luke 14:15-24).

131. Other strands in the Bible's testimony sit less easily with this model. Prosperity is a contested word. Sometimes it is achieved through wickedness (Psalm 73:3) but elsewhere it flows from righteousness (Proverbs 13:21) and sometimes, poverty is a mark of sin (Proverbs 10:4). Over against this, the story of Job directly confronts the claim of a causal link between poverty or suffering and sin. The direct link between behaviour and blessing fits poorly with an understanding of God's free grace, and the so-called 'prosperity Gospel' is damaging precisely because it denies God's essential freedom to bless creation independently of anything we do. However, contemporary interpreters should not discount the devastating impact of absolute poverty on human flourishing and how first-hand experience can shape theology in ways that may be unpredictable.
132. At the centre of the Christian quest for justice is the *missio Dei*: being challenged and amazed by what God is already doing in the world that God has made, and joining in. This leads to new ways of expressing God's bias to people experiencing poverty through prayerful collaboration with God's design for building just communities.
133. Contemporary readings of the Bible are shaped by recognition of the intrinsic, God-given value of individuals irrespective of their socio-economic status. Some responses to poverty downplay this, potentially patronising people by doing good 'to' them. Pastoral engagement focuses on working 'with' people, recognising their agency and autonomy in achieving just outcomes. This is embedded in the biblical witness to an incarnate God-with-us.
134. A far greater range of voices now engage in the interpretative conversation about biblical models of justice, with greater awareness of their own social location. The debate is enriched by contributions from people who have experienced injustice in their own lives. Alongside this, there is a fresh recognition of diversity in the voices of the Bible itself. For example, Tswana theologian Musa Dube edited *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible*. Her contribution retells the story of the woman with the flow of blood as Mama Africa, racked by HIV, calling out to Jesus for healing, while Native American theologian Laura Donaldson writes on Ruth's sister-in-law Orpah as a role-model for her community, choosing to remain with her own traditions rather than assimilating to an alternative culture.
135. The Bible challenges structural injustice, reflected in its critique of kings and their leadership (1 Samuel 8:9) and in ambivalence around empire. This takes

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contemporary readers far beyond a concern for individual acts of charity, as Christians seek directly to act against systemic injustice. We encounter the biblical imperative to steward creation and respond by addressing the structural injustice that has brought about the climate crisis. We push back against dehumanising treatment of refugees or trafficked individuals because of Scripture's teaching that all people are made in God's image. Core biblical emphases insist that we challenge injustice in our society as well as in our individual relationships.

God entrusts those with power with a special responsibility for upholding justice. Those seeking justice will encourage and challenge those with power to fulfil their vocation.

136. Intrinsically power is neutral; what matters is how power is used and its effects. Power is often best shared, but not always: it depends what kind of power we are talking about and the purpose for which it is being used. (It is significant that in the Genesis account of creation God gives power to human beings over the other animals (Genesis 1:26).) The powerful, whether individuals or groups, have a greater capacity and responsibility to make a difference to people's lives and the systems we live under. But all share the responsibility in establishing justice.
137. The biblical account shows clearly the expectation of the good ruler, the one who has legitimate power over others. There are prophetic warnings against corrupt rulers who fail to be good shepherds to the people, and the proper use of power is exemplified in the figure of the shepherd-king, most notably in the prophecies of Jeremiah (23:1-4) and Ezekiel (34). David stands out as a fine example of this, yet his actions involving Bathsheba also display its corrupting aspect. Most contexts today do not have easy parallels with such a role, although the misuse of power throughout history has caused incalculable suffering, and sadly continues to do so today. Power is often embodied in systems, structures and cultures and this brings particular responsibilities and challenges. Sometimes the pursuit of justice involves forms of collective action that are different from individual responses.
138. Jesus shows a radically different approach to the use of power through trust in God that shows, through love, how power can be liberating. He resists temptations to dominate and enables freedom through his healings, attention to the marginalised and, most of all, through his death and resurrection.
139. The powerful have a greater influence than they often understand or perceive. They are sometimes unaware of their powers or the impact of their actions upon others, and so need to be alerted to their particular responsibilities and led into a greater recognition of how their actions are experienced. A key aspect is helping people to see how power distorts perspectives. The powerful therefore require a humility of heart as well as mind to be challenged by those with less power,

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so that the justice becomes the product of co-creation rather than paternalism. In the pursuit of justice, power works best when shared but because it is often contested, there needs to be a preferential option for those with less power.

140. Power must not be abdicated through a reluctance to accept responsibility. The avoidance of power – through timidity or sloth – is just as much sin as is its improper use. The antidote to the misuse of individual power is found through proper humility and an increased critical understanding of a situation. The just use of power is a remedy against unjust systems through bringing about structural, political and economic change.
141. Those seeking justice for themselves are rarely the powerful but those denied the ability to effect change. Yet the pursuit of justice, like love, is the task of everyone irrespective of status.
142. Martin Luther King put it this way:

“Power . . . is the ability to achieve purpose . . . In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary to implement the demands of love and justice . . . Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice.”²⁶

God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice. It is never just someone else's responsibility. We all have a part to play.

143. The biblical account of human identity tells us that all people are made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). If one of God's defining characteristics is justice, then this is a quality every person shares, and can develop as they are transformed into the likeness of God.
144. Jesus came to bring freedom and abundance of life for all (John 10:10) through the life-giving Spirit (John 6:63). In him, Christians are adopted into God's family (Galatians 4:7). Christian identity thus has a multiple strand of active commitment to justice woven through it.
145. However, age, culture, gender, ethnicity and ability, among other factors, make people different. Even where people intentionally push back against the artificial barriers this diversity can create, different perceptions of what justice looks like can hinder solidarity. Those who campaign for justice must collaborate with the parallel work of others who come from different places but seek complementary

26 Martin Luther King, *Chaos or Community?* (London: Pelican, 1969)

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outcomes in building just societies. This is likely to entail giving preference to voices speaking from experiences of acute injustice. There is no room to privilege the stance or choices of people with better access to resources. Nor is it acceptable to work for the 'easy peace' (StF 719) which colludes with injustice.

146. Common interest brings people together into groups at many levels – local, national or international. The solidarity of such groups can be hugely beneficial especially where people are able to support one another and offer collective resistance to oppression, often with faith as a key driver. However, when groups are shaped by strong boundaries and clear demarcations between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', their negative potential is sharply focused. Strong internal cohesion can sit alongside hostility to those outside, with a narrowly defined understanding of justice in relation only to the concerns of the in-group. This militates against justice for all and potentially creates intense injustice.
147. Baptism brings a transformative self-understanding: there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). The boundaries of self-selecting human groupings, with their ambivalent potential for justice-seeking, are transcended by shared allegiance to Christ and the shared goal of participating in God's justice. It therefore strengthens the missional push towards justice and freedom when the worldwide Church's work for justice models collaboration and transcends internal, local, national or international boundaries. It is potentially catastrophic for the Church's witness when national or denominational difference leads to competition or disagreement.
148. The vision of collective responsibility for justice is both enriched and complicated by differing ideas within Christian tradition of what justice looks like for individuals, communities and nations. Despite possible tensions, there is capacity for renewal, transformation and liberation when Christians work together, and seek to work with those of other faiths, to resolve conflict through collaborative approaches, respecting the views of others and giving particular attention to voices from the margins.

God calls us to live in hope and in ways that reflect God's character and the pattern of God's kingdom.²⁷ Thus, seeking justice involves honesty and truth, and may demand protest and resistance, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation.

27 'Kingdom' is not an uncontested word, with its associations with a particular form of power, and so some prefer to speak of God's kin-dom, commonwealth or realm. It has been retained here, not uncritically, but both because it is a more familiar theological term, and because the kingdom promised by God and modelled by Jesus turns human ideas of kingdoms upside down.

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149. The pursuit of justice begins with God; justice is both God's work and God's very nature, and we are invited to participate in it. This means that seeking justice is both an imperative and a privilege for those who would seek to live according to God's ways. It is a call not only to intellectual ideas about justice, or hopes about a just future, but to words and actions in this world, at this time.
150. God's Word became flesh in Jesus, who turned the world's upside down values the right way up again, proclaiming a kingdom where the powerful are to act as servants to the powerless, those who are usually ignored are listened to and given agency, and relationships are healed. We are invited to speak God's word, but more than that, to be 'doers of the word, and not merely hearers' (James 1:22). We are called not just to words, but to deeds; if our focus is solely on words, we risk becoming hypocrites.
151. But further, we are called not just to deeds, but to a way of life – we must not simply refrain from unjust acts but be proactive in our justice-seeking. If God is so proactive in promoting the good of humanity, then followers of Christ are surely called to a way of life that imitates this proactivity? We are not just to refrain from injustice, but actively to seek peace and pursue it, in all our encounters, in our attitudes, and in our participation in the proclamation and enactment of the kingdom. We, too, are called to live in ways that upend the accepted values of the world. If we – as individuals or as members of institutions – have power, we are called to use it to serve; if we hold power unjustly, we are called to repent; if we benefit where historic injustice lingers in modern inequality, we are called to make restitution; and if our actions have caused or perpetuated injustice, we are called to listen carefully to uncomfortable truths, and to respond with humility.
152. In moving beyond deeds to a way of life that is oriented towards the hope of a new heaven and earth, we recognise that seeking justice is not about one-off acts of goodness, but about our whole attitude, as we seek to become more Christ-like, letting "the same mind be in [us] that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." (Philippians 2:5-7, *NRSVA*). And, because we will inevitably get it wrong at times, it is about constantly learning, trying again and, in seeking justice, seeking also our own transformation (Romans 12:2).
153. There are many ways in which these Principles can be further explored, and brought into dialogue with current injustices. The next section offers some Priorities for action and begins to make links with the Principles for justice identified in this section.

Section 4: Priorities for justice

Introducing the Priorities for justice

154. The **Priorities** for justice are intended to offer a focus for the Methodist Church in our commitment to seeking the transformation of the world.
155. These have emerged from reflection on conversations with Methodists (including global partners), people experiencing injustice, and Methodist and other organisations, as well as reflecting on the Bible, our hymns and our past. This is also a consideration of the gifts, strengths and opportunities we have now, as well as our limitations, which lead us to focus on 'what is ours to do'. Sometimes what is 'ours to do' may be 'our' as a Local Church; at other times it may be 'ours' as a District or as the Connexional Team. But, being connexional, we do it in each case on behalf of the whole Church.
156. Having such Priorities does not mean that Methodists or Methodist churches should not campaign or work on other issues that are urgent, important locally, or close to people's hearts. Instead, they are an attempt to focus our different voices, experiences and resources on a limited number of areas in order to increase our collective impact for change, whilst recognising that we will always seek to work ecumenically, across faiths and with wider civil society where we can.
157. It should also be noted that the gifts, skills, experience and potential of each individual, church and Methodist body will be different. The five Priorities themselves will resonate more in some contexts than in others. The expectation is not that each person, church or group tries to do everything, or even that they try to do something different each year, but rather that they discern, within the Priorities, that to which they can respond (or continue to respond), according to what is appropriate to their context or local situation. This may involve reflecting on what might challenge them, and will require prayerful consideration of what work they may be called to lay down.
158. The Methodist Conference and Methodists have spoken and acted on many issues of injustice over the years. It is often hard to put issues down, or to reassess, as new concerns arise. This leads to an ever growing snowball of responsibilities. This report is an opportunity to consider, amidst the growing demands and shrinking resources, what is ours to do.
159. Having Priorities will hopefully enable a more joined up approach to particular key issues. Having a limited focus will allow more strategic work bringing together

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different elements of our Church. For example, this might include: bringing together affected groups to shape the work; the growth of a community of practice for Local Churches, individuals and groups engaged in responding to an issue; the co-ordination of a public ecumenical campaign by JPIT; a commitment from others to offer preaching or study resources for local churches; or training in communication for leaders for justice by the connexional Communications Team. There might be other opportunities to engage with the Priorities for justice through other connexionally-resourced work or with partner organisations or wider networks.

160. Every member of the Methodist Church in Britain is able to join in with campaigns focused on political change, regardless of their jurisdiction. Sometimes this will be at the level of local councillor, or MS, MSP or MP, or elected Mayor. The Priorities will offer greater variety for participation, with churches from right across the Methodist Church in Britain able contribute to and participate in the Priorities in ways that are contextually and politically relevant to them. In addition, as happens at the moment, Districts and churches in different jurisdictions will continue to communicate with their governments.
161. Having Priorities does not mean that local communities should not identify other local concerns or that the Methodist Church cannot respond to emerging or urgent issues. Indeed both of these will need to sit alongside longer term work on Priorities if the Church is faithfully to seek justice.
162. Key to having Priorities is to offer the Methodist Conference itself another way of engaging with justice.

We recommend that the Conference sets aside time each year for members to confer deeply on one of the five Priorities, in a way which offers resource or direction for the future, a practice that could also be reflected in districts and circuits. There would also need to be space for the Conference to consider urgent issues through the normal channels, but the main focus would be on discerning where God is acting for justice within the priority areas and conferring on how the Methodist Church can best join in. The Mission Committee/Methodist Council will report annually to the Conference on progress on the other priorities.

163. The intention is that the priorities will stand for five years before being refreshed by the Conference, according to a process of evaluation and discernment to be agreed by the Methodist Council. In the Covenant service we are reminded that there are seasons and times when God will call us to particular services and ask us to lay aside others, and that we accept God's purposes for us. The Priorities are intended to echo this rhythm of reflection, commitment and action.

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164. We recommend the following Priorities for justice be adopted:

- 1. Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness**
- 2. Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God**
- 3. Seeking justice for refugees: one people, one world**
- 4. Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God**
- 5. Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation**

165. Each of these priorities is proposed because it is rooted in the Principles for justice, because there is a real need in our world today, because we heard people talk about them, and because we believe that we have something to offer as a Church – from our history, our relationships, our communities, our strengths – in order to make a difference. The tables below set out why this is the case for each of these priorities and what our contribution as a Church or Local Churches could be.

166. The examples given are not exhaustive. It is hoped there will be many more partners and connections. Similarly the suggestions of ‘what is ours to do’ and ‘starting points’ indicate the direction of travel, but will be developed more fully by those contributing to taking the priorities forward.

Priority 1	Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness
How does this link to the Principles?	God consistently shows a bias to those experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. This radically challenges the way we organise our society. Our value is not based on our (economic or other) contribution but because we are made in the image of God. God wants us not just to survive but to thrive and flourish.
What is the vision?	We hope for a world where every person and all God’s creation can thrive and flourish, living life in all its fullness. We believe that God has a particular orientation to those who are economically poor and marginalised. We long for a new economic narrative that is based on God’s justice which centres on people and the planet.

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Priority 1	Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness	
<p>What is the problem?</p>	<p>The current cost of living crisis and its long term impacts are dragging people deeper into poverty. Inequality and poverty scars the lives of individuals (particularly children) and communities in the UK.</p> <p>Whilst there is much work taking place developing the policy tools to end poverty, there is a lack of will from those in power to prioritise poverty and inequality in their decision making.</p>	
<p>What do we bring from our past?</p>	<p>From early Methodism there has been a concern for the poorest in society. Wesley was radical in his inclusion of the poorest, and a duty to care for the poor was included in the <i>Liverpool Minutes</i>. Central Halls prioritised work amongst the urban poor. Today a significant number of churches are active in supporting the poorest in local communities, through foodbanks, pantries, warm spaces, debt advice centres and more.</p> <p>In addition, JPIT has a reputation for detailed research and leading prophetic campaigning, and Methodists have engaged with their local and national leaders on poverty.</p>	<p><i>"One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it – and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Wesley</p>
<p>What did we hear from groups with first-hand experience?</p>	<p>Church Action on Poverty's Poverty Panel spoke in the context of the daily damaging impact of poverty. They said what is needed is a redistribution of wealth and power. People need enough to live on and to flourish. We need to be better connected and people need to be valued for being human. We need a new narrative about the economy which centres people and planet.</p>	<p><i>"If the debt was taken away, it would make a huge difference. I wouldn't get depressed. I would stop feeling mentally unsettled."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Leonie, JPIT's Reset the Debt campaign</p>
	<p>The connexional Safeguarding Team said that ending poverty would have the biggest impact on the safeguarding of children.</p>	

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Priority 1	Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness	
What did Methodist communities say?	<p>In the Justice Conversations, economic inequality and poverty were mentioned by a significant number of respondents. The cost of living crisis was mentioned a lot, as was the scandal of hunger in the UK. Many talked about the importance of fair wages, a review of benefits and equal opportunities around employment and education. Groups talked about a just world being a place where people can flourish, thrive and be happy, and where everyone has enough. Groups also talked about the need to listen to people who experience poverty.</p>	<p><i>"With rising living costs and the unavailability of housing, many people are struggling with the basics of food, water, shelter and heating".</i></p> <p><i>"A just world is . . . where the voices of the poor, the dispossessed, the under-represented voices are heard and listened to."</i></p>
What connections do we have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church at the Margins is nurturing and building new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people, and offering best practice – at least 60 per cent of New Places for New People funding is committed to areas of financial hardship. • £250,000 per annum from the Mission in Britain Fund is allocated to the districts for the purpose of advocacy of the Methodist Church's commitment to those experiencing poverty and inequality of resources and/or assistance by way of grants for personnel or property schemes, primarily to Local Churches and Circuits, to assist them in supporting those experiencing poverty and inequality of resources. 	

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Priority 1	Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-established Methodist presence in some communities experiencing poverty. • Action for Children has a priority of offering children the best start in life which includes tackling poverty through family support and advocacy • Many Methodist Schools are situated in areas of deprivation with strong links to the communities they serve. The Methodist Church strategy for its schools, <i>Transforming Lives</i> (2021), is committed to establishing more schools in areas of need. • The Methodist Fund for Human Need made emergency payments to 4,000 people facing hardship or destitution over the past five years. • JPIT has broad ecumenical connections and wider links with the anti-poverty sector including being seen as a coordinating voice for faith expressions around poverty and advocacy, particularly in building the moral case around ending poverty. Partnership with Church Action on Poverty, and work co-ordinating the Hirsch Cost of Living Report (2022) with Gordon Brown and 56 organisations has led to opportunities for leadership in building an anti-poverty movement ahead of the next general election (working between 2023-2025). • More than 12 per cent of all Methodist Churches hosted a Warm Welcome Space in winter 2022/23, actively demonstrating their commitment to those impacted by the cost of living crisis. • Since 2015, All We Can has been recognised as a leader in the sector in putting voices of the global south at the heart of strategy development.
<p>What do we bring?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A widely shared understanding that Methodists prioritise tackling poverty. The experience and commitment of local churches which are rooted in communities. • The Church at the Margins programme. • The expertise and reputation of JPIT as an ecumenical campaign and advocacy group. • Connections across grassroots community initiatives challenging poverty throughout the UK, as well as with national voices including political leaders, faith leaders and national charities.

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Priority 1	Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness
What is ours to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect – nurture relationships with people experiencing poverty to build new Christian communities and build transformational relationships between people engaged in the struggle with poverty and people with power to achieve lasting social change • Campaign – immediately against the impact of the cost of living crisis on those in poverty; as well as connecting local with national to build a longer term national anti-poverty movement aimed at putting the moral case to end UK poverty at the heart of the public and political debate in the run up to the next general election • Support – engage with communities to support people dragged into poverty through this crisis
A starting point might be . . .	<p>To reflect together on how well we know our local community, and indeed, people within our own congregation. This might involve intentional listening to one another and to neighbours. Walking prayerfully around the local area can be a powerful way of beginning to make connections, to notice things previously unseen, and to identify possible connections.</p>

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Priority 2	Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God	
How does this link to the Principles?	<p>God desires the flourishing of creation and human community within it. Romans 28:22-23 speaks of creation and humans within it longing for redemption. The flourishing of creation describes a situation in which the present and future of human beings and all living things are somehow secured, in ways that respect the delicate balance between creatures and the environment.</p> <p>A recognition that living justly is about a way of life, and also that where historic injustice lingers in modern inequality, we may be called to make restitution and reparation.</p>	
What is the vision?	<p>Our vision is of a world where a right relationship with God, creator of all, draws us into a right relationship with all creation, human and non-human, to enable the flourishing of all.</p>	
What is the problem?	<p>Humanity is living beyond the fragile limits of our planet – of which the climate crisis is just one indicator. Environmental injustice impacts first and hardest on the poorest. Lifestyles of overconsumption and economic models that pursue growth regardless of ecological impacts and place people already experiencing poverty in an increasingly worse situation.</p>	
What do we bring from our past?	<p>Wesley believed that creation is grounded in a God, and as part of God's creation we have responsibility to care. A person's lifestyle should show justice and integrity, requiring people, for example, to pray about the money they spend.</p> <p><i>Hope in God's Future</i> is a Methodist Conference statement on Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change</p>	<p><i>"The theological task is to reflect on modern scientific accounts of current and threatened future harms from climate change in the context of affirming the triune God as creator and redeemer of the universe. The scientific analyses of climate change and the role of human greenhouse gas emissions are well-grounded. It is now morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species."</i></p> <p><i>Hope in God's Future, 2011</i></p>

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Priority 2	Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God	
What did we hear from groups with first-hand experience?	<p>In the run up to the COP26 meeting, a global group of young people collected stories from countries such as Fiji, Zambia, Uruguay, Italy, India and Britain.</p> <p>They told stories of communities displaced by rising sea levels, crops that were failing because of drought, the impact on fishing of the warming of oceans, as well as the work that is happening to try and mitigate the impact of the climate crisis.</p>	<p><i>"The cry of the exiled Israelites, 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' is a cry that resonates deeply with Pacific people for whom, land, sea, spirituality and identity are profoundly interrelated. We cannot sing about our islands, our ocean without singing of our creator God. We are part of the land, we bleed and sweat the salt water of our ocean, we are part of creation. What is the song we then sing in the midst of the suffocation of our mother ocean? Our song is both praise and protest!"</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">The Revd James Bhagwan, Pastor in the Methodist Church of Fiji/General Secretary Pacific Conference of Churches</p>

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Priority 2	Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God	
<p>What did Methodist communities say?</p>	<p>In the Justice Conversations, a significant number of groups highlighted the importance of a healthy and flourishing environment – and how much humanity benefits from connection with creation. Most framed this in the terms of the impact of the climate crisis, and within this a number referred to the need to stop the burning of fossil fuels, to improve energy efficiency in homes, to make active travel easier, and to deal with landfill and recycling. Others talked about the need to live more simply, reducing consumerism and excessive consumption. A few raised the question of whether we can continue to focus on economic growth and still limit the damage to the planet.</p>	<p><i>A world where we have addressed the impact of climate change, so that all can have access to food, water, energy, housing in a safe way.</i></p> <p><i>People that have need to re-evaluate and adjust their lifestyles to address inequality and climate change.</i></p> <p><i>“All have a right to a clean and healthy environment and access to countryside and the coast.”</i></p> <p><i>“Where we have abandoned the obsession with consumption and instead focus on giving and creating.”</i></p>
<p>What connections do we have?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All We Can is working alongside communities who are experiencing the impact of the climate crisis. • Thirteen percent of churches are registered with EcoChurch/ EcoCongregation. There is a strong relationship with A Rocha, which runs EcoChurch and has received connexional funding. • The Methodist Conference has committed to becoming a Net Zero carbon emission Church by 2030. Action for Hope is the programme to encourage churches to focus on use of assets, wisdom and lifestyle. • The Methodist Church is a partner with Faith Invest which is co-ordinating global interfaith work. • The UMC General Board of Church and Society works at the UN COPs and the UN and has collaborated with the Methodist Church in Britain. The European Methodist Council has appointed a Youth Climate Ambassador. 	

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Priority 2	Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JPIT has run campaigns around Loss and Damage and local authority work to reach net zero. • Methodist Zero Carbon Group is a network of people committed to climate action. • The Central Finance Board has an ambition to invest in positive climate solutions. • Relationship with Faith for the Climate (multi-faith climate advocacy).
What do we bring?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear theological statement on climate change • A Conference commitment to net zero and a plan for churches to engage with it • Connections with partner churches and communities around the globe • Campaigns with global and local focuses
What is ours to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign – campaigning for awareness of the impact of climate crisis and the need to make restitution through the Loss and Damage scheme • Action for Hope – moving our churches towards net zero • Challenge - economic models which harm people and planet
A starting point might be . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take next steps with Action for Hope towards Net Zero

Priority 3	Seeking justice for refugees: one people, one world
How does this link to the Principles?	All humans are made in the image of God and are worthy of equal value and dignity. The denial, hindering or waste of God's gifts is not only sin against God but represents an injustice against others. The Bible presents challenges to structural injustice.
What is the vision?	Our vision is of a world where conflict, poverty, oppression do not force people to leave their homes We long for a society where people who are forced to seek sanctuary are treated with dignity and respect

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Priority 3	Seeking justice for refugees: one people, one world	
What is the problem?	<p>The UNHCR estimates the number of people forcibly displaced is now 89.3 million, with over 27.1 million refugees. Conflicts, poverty, and the climate crisis as well as the narrower definitions described in the refugee convention are behind this movement. In the UK, there is an anti-refugee narrative, with legislation increasingly limiting people's chances of exercising their right to claim asylum.</p>	
What do we bring from our past?	<p>Early Methodists established Stranger's Friend societies to target support towards migrants from rural areas who could not access locally based welfare systems.</p> <p>All We Can traces its roots back to the 1930s with the Methodist Refugee Fund, responding to the crisis facing refugees in Europe. Over the past 90 years Methodist people have supported All We Can in working alongside communities around the world, experiencing war, disaster and poverty.</p> <p>Local Churches and communities in Britain have offered a welcome and support to people arriving as refugees and asylum seekers.</p> <p>The Methodist Church has taken part in campaigns in support of people seeking sanctuary, including the successful campaign with Citizens UK to end the detention of child asylum seekers, and more recently the campaigns to Lift the Ban on asylum seekers working and against a two-tier asylum system.</p>	<p><i>"Will Methodists whose hearts are moved by thanksgiving for peace send gifts to help some of those whose sorrowful plight is involved in the terms of peace? This is an emergency call."</i></p> <p>Letter from the Revd Henry Carter to the Methodist Recorder, October 1938, appealing for support to set up the Methodist Refugee Fund</p>

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Priority 3	Seeking justice for refugees: one people, one world	
What did we hear from groups with first-hand experience?	<p>Asylum seekers spoke about the stress and uncertainty they faced, being unable to work, struggling to contact the Home Office, having little money and having difficulty accessing healthcare. Some praised the welcome and support they had received from a local Methodist Church of which they were now part.</p>	<p><i>"It is so stressful. We are not allowed to work, we have no money, there is no fresh food to eat. I worry for my family."</i></p> <p><i>"When I am walking in the street and I am feeling sad and lonely, I remember that I have a family at the church."</i></p>
What did Methodist communities say?	<p>A third of churches that responded to the Justice Conversations offer some kind of support to refugees or asylum seekers. A number of groups highlighted the needs of refugees, with some making links with conflict especially in Ukraine, historic global inequality and the climate crisis. Many called for a more generous response to people seeking sanctuary in Britain.</p> <p>Many also highlighted some of the drivers behind people seeking refuge, including global inequality, the climate crisis and conflict, and talked of the need to tackle these inequalities, rebalance resources, and ensure fair taxation and fair trade.</p>	<p><i>"That war means people don't have homes and become refugees."</i></p> <p><i>"The willingness of other countries, (especially those bordering Ukraine) to offer support to refugees puts the UK response to shame. Also hypocrisy when compared to attitude to Afghan refugees."</i></p>
What connections do we have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global partner churches with experience of sending and receiving refugees and migrants, and Districts which have links with them. • Experience within some fellowship groups and the London District <i>Moving Stories</i> project. • JPIT leading multiple campaigns, including co-ordinating local groups alongside asylum seekers. • Methodist Homes for Ukraine working with Citizens UK. 	

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Priority 3	Seeking justice for refugees: one people, one world
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Churches with experience of being alongside asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, for example in the Trinity Centre in Cardiff, the Methodist Asylum Project in Middlesbrough and Café Lingo on the Isle of Man. • OPCEMI [the Italian Methodist Church] and Mediterranean Hope – practical help and support for humanitarian visas. • Work alongside groups such as City and Church of Sanctuary, Citizens and Migrants Organise, Churches Commission on Migrants in Europe, Together with Refugees, Safe Passage, World Methodist Council.
<p>What do we bring?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with partner churches in countries that send and receive refugees and migrants • Part of a broad coalition supporting refugees in Britain • Moral voice rooted in long-standing commitment and a willingness to challenge populist anti-immigration narratives
<p>What is ours to do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign – against moves to further restrict rights to claim asylum in Britain and to support alternatives such as humanitarian visas • Support – offer practical support for people seeking refuge, from participating in Government schemes to hosting destitute asylum seekers or becoming a Church of Sanctuary • Stories – Seek to shift the narrative about refugees and asylum seekers, for example through supporting people seeking refuge in telling their stories and helping communities share stories about countries that send and receive refugees around the world
<p>A starting point might be . . .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your local authority, Refugees Welcome group or local refugee organised group to find out how refugees and asylum seekers are housed in your area. Explore what they need and how you might help to affirm their well-being, agency and dignity. • Consider what it means to become a Church of Sanctuary.

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Priority 4	Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God
How does this link to the Principles?	<p>God calls all people and nations actively to work for peace and justice, liberation and transformation. The Bible presents challenges to structural injustice.</p> <p>All humans are made in the image of God and are worthy of equal value and dignity. We are not just to refrain from injustice, but actively to seek peace and pursue it, in all our encounters, in our attitudes, and in our participation in the proclamation and enactment of the kingdom. We, too, are called to live in ways that upend the accepted values of the world. Power must not be abdicated through a reluctance to accept responsibility. The avoidance of power – through timidity or sloth – is just as much sin as is its improper use.</p>
What is the vision?	<p>A society where there is justice and dignity for all, especially those who have previously been excluded, and where the Church stands in active solidarity with them.²⁸</p>
What is the problem?	<p>As some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant income inequality between ethnic groups, due largely to lower wages, higher housing costs and the impact of the benefit cap. • Disabled people are more likely to be living in poverty, unemployed and without further qualifications. • Evidence suggests that people from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are at higher risk of developing a mental health problem in adulthood, but are less likely to receive support for their mental health. • Black Caribbean children are around 1.7 times more likely to be permanently excluded from schools compared to White British children. • Disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people who share certain protected characteristics.²⁹ • People who experience more than one form of disadvantage or discrimination (intersectionality) are hit even harder.

28 Adapted from JDS strategy

29 commonslibrary.parliament.uk/income-inequality-by-ethnic-group, accessed 7 March 2023; jrf.org.uk/blog/disability-destitution, accessed 7 March 2023; Mental Health Statistics (England), House of Commons Library 2021; School Exclusions, House of Commons Library 2020; nhsconfed.org/publications/unequal-impact-covid-19-protected-characteristics, accessed 7 March 2023

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Priority 4	Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God	
<p>What do we bring from our past?</p>	<p>Wesley recognised that the structures of society affected upon the individual – for example the influence of rising grain prices on people experiencing poverty or the violent impact of colonialism - and took a personal stand. He spoke out strongly against the slave trade and was deeply affected by writing of Olaudah Equiano, a former slave.</p> <p>Methodism sought to tackle racism within and beyond the Church, for example, in <i>A Tree God Planted</i> (1985) and the work of MELRAW.</p> <p>A slow but growing recognition of the need to change our Church's structures and culture which have excluded people, embodied in a commitment to the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy.</p> <p>Many examples of Methodists and groups speaking and acting against discrimination and for transformation of oppressive structures, nationally and globally.</p>	<p><i>"Where is the justice . . . of depriving them of liberty itself, to which an Angolan has the same natural right as an Englishman, and on which he sets as high a value?"</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Wesley, <i>Thoughts on Slavery</i></p>
<p>What did we hear from groups with first-hand experience</p>	<p>Most groups with first-hand experience who offered responses focused on their experiences of discrimination within church contexts. From JDS and EDI officer we heard about the impact of intersectionality, and the piling up of multiple disadvantage on groups. Young people at 3Generate spoke about experiences of racism, fears of violence, and discrimination</p>	<p><i>"I was 14 and coming home from school. I was stopped by the police. They asked for my name, and searched my bag. I was the only one stopped in my group of friends. I was the only Black person. I was 14 and I just wanted to go home."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Young Methodist from East London</p>

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Priority 4	Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God	
What did Methodist communities say?	<p>Equality and inclusion were significant themes within the Justice Conversation responses. Some talked about tolerance, others framed respect more positively in terms of the dignity of the other; others talked about the importance of mutual respect in enabling dialogue, communication and the appreciation of difference.</p> <p>Many also referred to need to end discrimination and prejudice. Racism, gender inequality and the barriers faced by disabled people were mentioned most frequently, with people also making links between discrimination and worse access to housing, employment or other services.</p> <p>At 3Generate tackling racism was in amongst the top issues identified by young people.</p>	<p><i>"That all are treated equally as being made in the image of God regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age or sexuality."</i></p> <p><i>"Barriers to people accessing education such as poverty, lack of necessary facilities and racial, social or gender discrimination."</i></p>
What connections do we have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JDS strategy focusing on embedding EDI within the Church • Creation of Solidarity Circles of people with lived experiences • Place for Hope mediation and reconciliation work • JPIT work on poverty which has potential for drawing out intersectionality • Ecumenical work on reparations/ policing/racial justice • Fellowship groups • Relations with global partners • All We Can staff chairs an international NGO group on decolonising aid • A younger generation in the Church who strongly oppose discrimination • Local congregations bringing experience from their communities 	

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Priority 4	Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God
What do we bring?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodist theology underpinning the work • An active JDS strategy with a strand focused on transformation • Existing commitments to campaigning on injustices which can be linked together • A growing willingness to face up to our past
What is ours to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intersectionality – as a key way of understanding injustice. Ensuring work on all priorities seeks out ways of engaging with multiple disadvantage • Solidarity – Complementing JDS strategy in seeking opportunities for churches to stand alongside communities opposing discrimination • Prioritising – support for young people experiencing discrimination in society
A starting point might be . . .	Screen the film <i>After the Flood: The Church, Slavery and Reconciliation</i> at your church and host a conversation about the implications of it.

Priority 5	Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation
How does this link to the Principles?	Peace and justice are tightly woven together. Peace cannot exist without justice. Creation and human community can't truly flourish unless the world is at peace. Peace requires a cultural shift away from violence. In order to create peace in the world we need to know peace within our own relationships and communities too.
What is the vision?	For God's vision of peace to reign. Where people reject violence as the answer and weapons are turned into tools to feed the community.

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Priority 5	Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation	
What is the problem?	<p>Global conflicts kill, injure and displace millions every year. The majority of conflicts are between non-state actors, such as political militias or terrorist groups, rather than between states. Over 60 per cent of conflicts in the early 2000s relapsed or reoccurred within five years, showing the root causes have not been tackled and a false peace created. Violence and conflict are interwoven with poverty, homelessness, environmental degradation and historic injustices. Nations and industry promote a narrative that security can only be achieved through increased military expenditure, which restricts resources put into reconciliation and peace-building. The possession of nuclear weapons implies the possibility of their use and yet any use of nuclear weapons would be immoral.</p>	
What do we bring from our past?	<p>Methodist Central Hall Westminster hosted the inaugural meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946.</p> <p>Significant strand of Conscientious Objection particularly amongst some in the Primitive Methodist Church. The Methodist Peace Fellowship was founded in 1933 to inform and unite Methodists who covenanted together “to renounce war and all its works and ways.”</p> <p>Widespread support for 0.7 per cent GDP aid spending campaign, which has involved spending on peace and reconciliation.</p> <p>Methodist Conference support for the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.</p> <p>A diversity of views around war, peace and faith shown by a strong pacifist strand of theology co-existing alongside connexional support for forces chaplaincy, with the current Army Chaplain General and Deputy Chaplain General both being Methodist ministers.</p>	<p><i>“So long as this monster [war] stalks uncontrolled, where is reason, virtue, humanity? They are utterly excluded. They have no place. They are a name and nothing more.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Wesley said of war in <i>The Doctrine of Original Sin</i></p> <p><i>“You never cast out evil by evil. You can’t conquer violence by more violence, or fear by terror.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Donald Soper</p>

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Priority 5	Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation	
<p>What did we hear from groups with first-hand experience?</p>	<p>People spoke of the need for those who have not experienced conflict to be aware of the complexity of conflict. The roots are deeply intertwined with a place's history, culture and sense of identity. There is no easy answer, and those on the 'outside' need to resist the temptation to see themselves as rescuers/heroes.</p> <p>Even when things look peaceful, tension and the potential for violence can often lurk beneath the surface. Unless the injustices which nurture conflict are addressed (economic and social marginalisation and discrimination, misuse of power, corruption) the legacy of conflicts long past, and the psychological impact of living through or escaping conflict, can continue to choke the potential for individuals and communities to flourish.</p> <p>People shared that it is often the most vulnerable people in our community who are drawn in to conflict and then are unable to escape.</p>	<p><i>"We've had so many people come in wanting to 'fix' the conflicts in our community, and usually, they don't stay long. Once the money has run out, or things get tough, they leave again. And then the next person comes along, with their ideas."</i></p> <p><i>"Cessation of military hostilities without the acknowledgement of past atrocities have not achieved lasting 'peace.' The acknowledgement of past atrocities without meaningful attention paid to the upholding of human rights has left our community in permanent unsettledness."</i></p>

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Priority 5	Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation	
<p>What did Methodist communities say?</p>	<p>The need for peace was mentioned by a large number of respondents. Many of these referred to it in the abstract, or as an end to conflict in the world, but some referred to specific conflicts, especially in Ukraine, and also in places such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Whilst most groups framed the call for peace in Ukraine as an end to the conflict, with a very small number saying that those fighting should be supported, a few specifically called for violence not to be used in bringing about peace. Questions were also raised about the need for justice for crimes committed during times of conflict.</p> <p>There were a number of references to the domestic need for peace with the issue of knife crime, an issue which also received significant support at 3Generate. A number of responses also talked about a vision of a safe world, an end to gender-based violence, and a desire for personal safety, conditions which are needed lay the foundations for peace in people's environments.</p>	<p><i>"My heart breaks for those in Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine particularly where conflict robs so many of the right to healthy lives."</i></p> <p><i>"Peace – conflict has driven the number of refugees up to record levels."</i></p>

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Priority 5	Pursuing peace: seeking justice and reconciliation
<p>What connections do we have?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the MCB and Global Church partners with experience of conflict and post-conflict • Methodist Churches and Individuals who have supported refugee resettlement schemes, often from places of immediate conflict like Syria and Ukraine. • Methodist Peace Fellowship/Fellowship of Reconciliation • All We Can and Christian Aid with experience of working in areas of long term impact of conflict • Groups such as the United Methodist Church have representation at the United Nations • Methodist forces chaplains • Place for Hope reconciliation and mediation pilot • Mission partners in conflict and post-conflict areas, eg Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine, Haiti • The Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches
<p>What do we bring?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scriptures which are replete with a vision of God's kingdom where justice and peace "kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10) • Congregations and partner churches with first-hand experience of conflict and violence • Campaigning experience around peace and weapons
<p>What is ours to do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipping – speaking more confidently about peace and non-violence – theologically and politically – whilst recognising our disagreements • Stories – Sharing stories of experiences of violence and conflict • Campaigning – for a just peace, for example through campaigns to fund post-conflict reconciliation and alternatives to conflict
<p>A starting point might be ...</p>	<p>Find out whether your bank or pension scheme is investing in nuclear weapons through #InvestingInChange supported by the Methodist Church, and write to ask them about their policies - investinginchange.uk</p> <p>Use resources reflecting on peace on Peace Sunday or Remembrance Sunday</p>

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Taking forward the Priorities for justice

167. **If these Priorities are accepted by the Conference, then we recommend that collaborating groups for each one be formed, made up of individuals from Methodist entities, groups, networks and parts of the Connexional Team with an interest in the Priorities. These collaborative and light-touch groups would focus on what is identified as 'ours to do' and bring their own contributions. Together they would agree how to resource Methodist engagement with the Priorities for justice, co-creating current and future activity.**
168. The section on 'embedding' the report in Section 6 outlines some of the ways this approach might make a difference.

Section 5: Practices for Justice

What does it look like to practice justice? The Quaker Meeting House in Chelmsford is near the Crown Court. In 2018, 15 young people were charged with aviation security offences after breaching Stansted Airport's fence and locking themselves together around the front nose-wheel of a plane which was being prepared to deport 60 people to Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The protesters claimed that they were acting to prevent human rights abuses taking place. Hundreds of people gathered outside the Crown Court.

Members of several Quaker Meetings nearby supported the protesters' non-violent stance in opposition to mass deportations, and collectively agreed to give their support. Some Quakers provided accommodation in their homes to defendants and family members for the duration of the trial. Chelmsford Meeting collectively decided to provide their Quaker Meeting House for use as a sanctuary and base for the defendants and their supporters, with Quakers providing food for larger gatherings. Local Quakers, the defendants, and some supporters held a Quaker Meeting for Worship on the evening before the trial started. One Quaker regularly stood on the steps outside the courthouse with sandwich-boards expressing support for the Stansted 15. Many local Quakers attended the several large vigils held outside the courthouse at key points in the trial, and brought food for the participants. Some Quakers offered spiritual and pastoral support to defendants and supporters as needed. And on many days of the trial, Quakers sat conspicuously in the courtroom to show their solidarity with the defendants.

All of these people were involved in Quaker witness against deportation. They responded in a range of ways – standing in solidarity, praying, making food –

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according to their own personal gifts or preferences, whilst being upheld by their cohesion as a worshipping community.

As Quakers, each person's contribution became an act of activism because of the collective witness of the Meeting.

The Stansted 15 were acquitted on appeal, after the Court ruled that there was no case to answer.

169. A justice-seeking Church and people need practices which will enable sustainable, flourishing, transformative, action for justice, rooted in God.
170. Christian discipleship includes the call to be and to act as a prophetic community; people who are both willing to recognise and engage with the reality of the 'world as it is', and who yet look with hope and anticipation to the 'world as it should be', and in all their actions seek to bring that transformation.
171. As Methodists, our justice-seeking takes place in the local, connexional and global spheres; we seek justice both as part of our individual discipleship and also as part of a body committed to the connexional principle of belonging, mutuality and interdependence.³⁰ Our participation in God's work of justice-seeking, liberation, transformation and flourishing can take many different forms.
172. This section considers two approaches to practising justice – ways of *being* and ways of *doing*. It sets out some of the practices which enable sustainable, flourishing, transformative, rooted, action for justice.

Approaches to practicing justice: ways of *being*

173. In Section 2, five ways of being or approaches were identified which enable us to be 'at our best' when seeking justice. These approaches to practicing justice – being with, humility in community, the use of power, transformation and prayer – enable sustainable, transformative and rooted action for justice to develop in churches and communities, as well as keeping our actions grounded in and guided by our faith. Because justice is a complex and often contested notion, these practices help us to stay close to God and to those who experience injustice. They assist us in discerning how and where to act, as well as humbly

30 *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), Section 4.6, methodist.org.uk/media/1993/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf

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acknowledging our failures and limitations. They spring from and can be woven into a Methodist Way of Life, and build on the expectation that Methodists are engaging in various forms of justice activity.

174. This section explores these 'ways of being' in more detail, in the hope that they will help when examining our own practices or making decisions about how we can be 'at our best' when seeking justice.

Being with not for³¹

175. Justice is about 'being with' people rather than 'working for' people. 'Being with' means our relationships are characterised by friendship, respect and a willingness to give time to listening. We practise justice in ways that involve communities in making decisions together, people experiencing injustice having agency and dignity, and people standing and working in solidarity together.
176. In doing this, it is vital to listen to and learn from those rooted in situations of injustice and those with significant knowledge of the issue. If we do not have personal experience ourselves, we practice 'being with' by seeking the knowledge and wisdom of those with first-hand experience. Relying solely what we think we know, or a "theology of good intentions"³², whilst intending our actions for good, can instead cause further harm. Learning from people with experience of injustice may sometimes lead to unlearning what we have previously thought to be true.
177. Yet the burden for action must not be placed on those who have experienced in justice. If we ourselves have experience of injustice, we may choose to share our experience openly. Yet trauma, tiredness or rage, amongst other reasons, may mean we do not wish to speak and that is sufficient. There are many ways in which people who wish to be attentive to injustice can listen.
178. Practising justice through 'being with' means co-creating the space for careful listening before acting, because 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us.'

31 Sam Wells in *The Nazareth Manifesto* has helped to popularise the approach of 'being with' rather than 'working for' when churches are engaging with justice. The principle of 'subsidiarity' outlined in Catholic social teaching is similar – instructing that decisions about how we seek justice and transformation should be made as close as possible to the people affected by them. It can also be found in Methodism – from John Wesley's emphasis on visitation, to the approach of the *God for All Church at the Margins* programme.

32 Anthony Reddie, *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Epworth press, 2003), p.134-140

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Humility in community

179. Justice is about being alongside our neighbours, including those with lived experience of injustice, in communities both local and global. As Methodists, we are part of a Connexion. We do not work alone but within an ongoing mutual conversation between Local Churches, different parts of the Connexion, the world community, and those of other faiths and none seeking to act justly. We are called to walk humbly with God, and with one another.
180. As part of a Methodist Way of Life, we are called to “notice God in Scripture, and the world.” As we try to notice and understand God’s justice, our vision and understanding will only ever be proximate. When we are seeking justice this means recognising that we as individuals or a gathered community may not understand that ‘full picture’. We may well get things wrong, and there is always more to learn. Practising humility in our communities involves being honest and realistic about what churches represent and can offer. We are rarely the size or strength we once were, nor do we have all the resources, on our own, that are needed to enact change. But we are not tasked to be hero or rescuer, and instead called to respond as collaborators with God! This should prompt us to ask how we can join in with our communities rather than lead them.
181. This way of being involves partnering with others locally and globally, building community with those different from ourselves, and, as we are not the most significant players, collaborating where we can.

Self-awareness and the use of power

182. Justice is about recognising power imbalances within the world and our communities, and being wise in our use of power. None of us stands outside the systems that constitute our communities and societies, or systems of sin that disconnect us from God, from each other, from the created world. We may benefit, knowingly or unknowingly, from the power imbalances that maintain injustices in our world. For example, we may buy goods at low prices from supply chains that use cheap or exploited labour in other parts of the world, leaving such workers unable to build better lives. If we are male, white and European, we may have advantages which consciously or unconsciously oppress others. We therefore need to recognise that sometimes our sense of injustice is a reaction to a loss of advantage.
183. Being attentive to power involves self-awareness and careful discernment, about what we, as individuals and church, are called to do and how we are called to

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respond. We are sometimes called to give our power away to others, to share it, or to claim it and use it well. Jesus knew well how to use or sacrifice power; following his example in this is profoundly counter-cultural and is part of our calling to “live in a way that draws others to Jesus”.³³

184. Power is intrinsically neutral. As explored in the section on the Principles, it can be used for good or ill effect, but it cannot be ignored. Failing to recognise power can lead us to (mis)use it in ways that are not constructive, or that diminish the power and agency of others.
185. If we do not rightly recognise our power, as individuals or collectively, we risk being ineffective, or making the action about ‘us’ and not the issue being addressed. For example, in speaking out for justice, if we are not speaking from our own lived experience, we need to use the stories of others with integrity, so that the focus remains on the injustice and not on ourselves. If those with lived experience are invited to speak and share, the support they might need should be considered in order that they and their stories are not exploited or sensationalised.
186. This way of being involves recognising and regularly reflecting on our place and our interests within the system, so we may make a better society.

Visibility and transformation

187. Following a Methodist Way of Life includes “challenging injustice”, and this involves bringing to light injustices that are ignored or unrecognised, as well as those which are very stark. It is about transforming the deep or systemic issues that cause those injustices and not only responding to the immediate problems they cause.
188. Desmond Tutu is credited with saying, “*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.*” We acknowledge that some injustices are hidden away, ignored or silenced by those in power, and the causes of injustice are often complex and hidden. We commit to drawing attention to situations and the causes of injustice, raising awareness and not allowing them to be hidden. Like the prophets, we will not sit quiet while the vulnerable are forgotten, even if speaking out makes us unpopular.

33 A Methodist Way of Life, methodist.org.uk/media/19302/mwol-a6-booklet-1020.pdf, accessed 16 March 2023

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189. Our justice-seeking should focus both on present injustices and on future transformation. Seeking justice not only involves responding to immediate needs, but also transforming the deep or systemic injustices that causes those needs. This means being willing to engage with the reality of the world as it is and the challenges faced by many, but also holding on to the hope that transformation, healing, and right relationship can and will be restored, leading to the flourishing of all God's creation. This way of being involves reviewing what we are doing, celebrating where change has taken place, being open to discerning a different way of engaging, and journeying with God to new things.

Prayer

190. Justice is about connecting with God, holding both our action and limitations before God, and seeking in prayer the well-being and flourishing of others. We are called to 'pray daily' and 'worship with others regularly.' In prayer, we may express our anger, our powerlessness and our passion for change in the face of many tragedies and injustices, confess our failings, and offer our thanks for small or large positive change. This way of being involves connecting to the character and work of the God of justice, so that we draw on limitless divine grace, and live hopefully.

Approaches to practising justice: ways of *doing*

191. So what should we do to make justice? How do we respond to injustice or put justice-seeking into practice, in our personal and community lives?
192. Firstly, we should ensure that we participate in a process of discernment about how to respond to injustice. Catholic theologians and liberation base communities developed the model of See-Judge-Act (or See-Discern-Act) to help people to reflect critically and theologically on the realities we face – and, crucially, to resist the temptation of leaping in straight to action. Through this method a community will review or 'see' a situation of injustice in the light of understanding the reality in its social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. Then through a process of social analysis and scriptural and theological reflection they can discern or 'judge' the deeper truths. In the light of this, proposals for action to change the situation and address its root causes will emerge, empowering those who are disadvantaged in this situation. Of course

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this is a cycle or a spiral that should be constantly repeated and evaluated, alongside those most closely affected by the situation where possible.³⁴

193. Secondly, we need to reflect on how those actions contribute to the change we want to see. How do they bridge the gap between what is and what we believe should be?
194. Sometimes, only certain actions are available to us. Some actions may sit more naturally with our temperament. Some are more open to those with certain privileges. When there is a choice, we are also challenged to choose the action that is most likely to have an impact and contribute to bring about change.
195. Complex problems, such as environmental degradation or health inequalities remain intractable because they are held in place by various constraints, eg government policies, societal norms, market forces, power imbalances, or accepted narratives about society. To tackle them systemic change, not piecemeal change, is needed. System change happens at three levels – structural, relational and transformative.³⁵ For example, campaigning for changes in legislation tries to achieve structural changes, community organising can bring about relational change, and communicating a different story can help to change the narratives needed for transformative change.
196. Crucially, shifts in system change are most likely to be sustained when working at all three different levels of change. For example, in 2016 a large number of refugees were given refuge in mainland Europe. The practices, policies and resources were put in place to enable their resettlement. But without promoting an accompanying

34 **See** – what is happening, who is involved, who gains, who loses, why is it happening, why does it continue?

Judge – how do you feel about this situation? What do you think should be happening? Are there Bible stories which have a resonance here? What does your faith say to you about this situation

Act – What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening (the reality) and what should be happening (the ideal/what our faith says)? What action are we going to take? Who can we involve in our action?

For more on using this methodology, see grassroots.caritas.eu/see-judge-act

35 The first level of changes, **structural**, are the most visible, and include policies which guide governments, organisations or others' actions, practices or the habits of groups, and how money, people, knowledge, information and other assets are distributed. The second level of changes – **relational** – are less apparent. These include relationships and the quality of connections between those involved in the system, and power dynamics or the distribution of formal or informal decision-making powers or influences amongst individuals or groups. Finally are the third level of changes – **transformative** – which are implicit. These concern the powerful but unarticulated beliefs, assumptions or narratives that influence what we think or do. See efc.issuelab.org/resources/30855/30855.pdf, accessed 6 March 2023

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narrative to change existing residents' narratives about asylum seekers, a dominant message of fear of 'the other' undermined successful resettlement in some places. In contrast, Poverty Truth Commissions are about building relationships between people who have power and those who are made vulnerable by particular circumstances. The quality of those relationships enables those with experience of poverty to share the reality of particular systems or policies and influence those who have more power to change them for everyone – structural, relational and transformative level change happening together. As a Church and a body of individuals, being in relationship, working locally, nationally and with global partners, we should consider what is ours to do in the changes needed at structural, relational and transformative levels to unlock complex problems.

197. Churches, individuals and groups are engaged in a range of actions for justice. The following non-exhaustive list describes some of the key ways in which Methodists are found acting for justice, and some of the challenges that are involved.
198. **Responding to need:** Following a Methodist Way of Life involves “helping people in our communities and beyond.” The many and varied social action projects of Local Churches usually begin in response to an identified need or injustice within their community. The multiple resources available to a local church – a building, volunteers, specific funding sources, and experience around safeguarding and other policies – can allow a church to be agile in response. Volunteering with a social action project, or advocating for a person in need, can be a source of transformation and change for the volunteers themselves, and, for many community members, church, at its best, can feel like a warm and welcoming place of hospitality and generosity.
Examples include Warm Welcome spaces, debt advice centres, refugee support centres
199. Responses to need must also have a justice dimension and work with others to create agency and long-term change. Otherwise there is a danger that justice work becomes only about social provision, lacking an analysis of the injustice involved or the transformation needed. Or there is a risk that social action becomes disconnected from our social engagement. We need to be wary of providing a service that we just assume is needed, rather than building relationships with those in our community in order to achieve change that lasts. This is part of our commitment to learning and telling of the love of God.
Examples include community pantries, campaigns shaped by people with first-hand experience
200. **Relationship building** takes time and a commitment to seeking renewal in our relationship with God, ourselves and with others. “Caring for ourselves and

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those around us” is key to Methodist discipleship and must be lived out in our justice-seeking. Anchoring our social engagement in listening and relationship building enables a deeper understanding of the issues, renews our commitment, and offers the possibility of providing advocacy, developing local leadership and working in solidarity and collaboration for wider structural change.

Examples include asset-based community development, community organising, Church at the Margins

201. **Changing rules or practices** can take place at local, national and global level. We have a role in engaging in the systems, processes and cultures of our political life as much as practical action. When looked at as a whole, any social justice issue can feel overwhelming, and we may feel lost as to where to begin to seek change. Change often happens through small steps. If our justice-seeking is rooted in relationship, both with those who have first-hand experience and those who have decision-making power and the ability to make change happen, then we are better able to focus our actions on making a difference. As we seek to influence structural change, our key questions might be: Have we identified where the decision-making power is in relation to this issue? Who has the power and ability to make change? Who are our potential partners or collaborators in this work? What is in our power to do?
Examples include campaigning, lobbying, awareness raising
202. **Personal:** there will be certain issues which matter particularly to us as individuals – either because we have some connection to these through lived experience, encounter with others, or a sense that this is something God has called us to engage with as part of our own calling. Our decisions about what we do with our finances, how we treat others, what we do with our time, all have a potential impact, for good or for ill.
Examples include ethical choices in our lifestyle, using our financial power, commitment to a particular cause
203. **Creative and symbolic** acts of prophetic witness can raise awareness of injustice, but also engage people more deeply through opportunities to lament, to pray, to seek confession and restitution, or to offer hope in times of overwhelm. In these types of action there is often opportunity for sharing faith and the good news of the gospel. Craft, music, art and drama can be powerful allies in prophetic witness.
Examples include Craftivism, public liturgy, symbolic protests
204. **Visible activism**, joining in solidarity with others to agitate for change around a shared cause can be a powerful and highly visible way of acting for justice. Yet we increasingly recognise that it is an action which is not accessible to all; not

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everyone can go on a march and some people put themselves at greater personal risk than others when protesting. A question which still arises is that regarding whether Methodists ought to join in acts of civil disobedience or resistance. The 1986 Conference report, *Accept and Resist*, offers the possibility of these as Christian responses, saying that actions should be focused on policy, not individual persons, and should only be engaged in after careful self-reflection, prayerful discernment, and a commitment to accepting the consequences of engaging in such acts.

Examples include participation in demonstrations, civil disobedience or resistance

205. All of these actions have a place in a justice-seeking Church. Some may be more needed at particular times and places. We may as individuals have different strengths and preferences. We are each called to join in with God's kingdom plan and together our acts become powerful. The example given at the start of this section of the Quakers in Chelmsford reminds us that *"each person's contribution became an act of activism because of the collective witness of the Meeting."*
206. However we choose to respond to injustice, we should reflect on what we do and how we do it, asking is there integrity between our ways of doing and ways of being? Do our acts of justice demonstrate and embody being with, humility in community, self-awareness and the use of power, visibility and transformation, and are they rooted in prayer? Using these different approaches to justice can help us to examine our current and planned justice activities, ensuring that they contribute to change - and are consistent with our beliefs about God's justice.
207. **We recommend that the material on *Approaches to justice: ways of doing and Approaches to justice: ways of being* in Part 5 of the report be used in all parts of the life of the Methodist Church, locally and connexionally, as criteria when we reflect on our life, work, decisions and actions.**
208. In the final section we look at how the Principles, Priorities and Practices for justice could be embedded within the Methodist Church to make a difference in the Church and the world.

Section 6: What might it look like to be a justice-seeking Church?

Embedding being a justice-seeking Church

209. The sections on Principles, Priorities and Practices for justice reflect what has been heard about how the Methodist Church envisages God's justice being seen at this time and place. How then might this be achieved through our practices or actions?

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- 210. In order to give life to the Principles, Priorities and Practices identified in the Walking with Micah report, we recommend that a two-year plan be developed to enable and embed the following throughout the life of the Methodist Church, including:**
- a. Integration of the 'Principles for justice' into our learning and decision-making**
 - b. Engagement with the 'Practices: approaches to justice' at all levels of church life**
 - c. Collaboration on the 'Priorities for justice' between partners,³⁶ developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement**
 - d. Support for Local Churches to engage with local communities within a justice framework**
211. Success will depend on collaboration and participation of teams within the Connexional Team, wider Methodist organisations, as well as circuit and district leadership deciding how to embed the Principles, Priorities and Practices in participatory ways within their own mission. The following are examples of actions which could help to embed the outcomes of this report within the Methodist Church:
- 212. Integration of the 'Principles for justice' into our learning and decision-making**
- Identification of opportunities to engage with the Principles through, for example, ministerial formation, preacher development, 3Generate, Cliff College, Learning Network
 - Development of resources for small groups and Bible studies around the Principles for justice, including resources for intergeneration conversations and youth group settings
 - Use of Principles by JPIT when exploring current challenges
 - Intentional use of Principles, in appropriate language, when articulating Methodist responses to injustices
 - Reflection of the language of the Principles in prayer and liturgy

³⁶ Partners are envisaged as being those with an interest in the Priorities, including Methodist entities and relevant parts of the Connexional Team, as well as Local Churches, groups and networks

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213. Engagement with the 'Practices: approaches to justice' at all levels of church life

- Development of a tool for churches and others within the Connexion to explore their own justice activities in the light of the approaches to justice, and those of organisations with which they wish to engage in partnership
- Intentional use of the language of the approaches to practising justice in Methodist communication

214. Collaboration on the 'Priorities for justice' by partners, developing clear and integrated plans and opportunities for local church engagement

- Annual conferring at the Conference on a theme arising from the Priorities for justice, which is used to shape future work, as well as a report on the other priorities
- Working ecumenically where possible, committed collaboration around the Priorities for justice from Methodist and non-Methodist entities – potentially in the form of a strategic collaboration group for each of the priorities, continuing to model participation
- A flexing of connexionally-resourced support for effective work around the Priorities for justice – for example, this might involve: JPIT reflecting the priorities in its workplan; Children Youth and Family considering how children and young people can be supported in their discipleship through working for justice and influencing change through their churches, 3Generate or the Agents of Change Discipleship and Vocation resource; global Church partners shaping MCB work on refugees; other Methodist organisations such as All We Can exploring where their advocacy work overlaps with the priorities
- Communities of practice for individuals and churches deeply engaged with each of the Priorities in order to support one another and shape the work on the Priorities
- Development of shared plans for delivering campaigns, resources, communications on the five priorities, with clear messaging and opportunities for churches to join in or to flex to reflect local circumstances
- Explore models to develop and resource a consistent representative communicator on each Priority for justice

215. Support for Local Churches and others making a shift towards justice

- Collaboration across mission planning, Church at the Margins, a Methodist Way of Life, Learning Network, ministries, communications, JPIT, Children Youth and Family, ministerial training etc

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- Resources for churches, including intergenerational resources, as they reimagine worship, along with resources and training for preachers and worship leaders
- Collective support in prayer for those engaged in justice-seeking, eg the online Micah community being piloted by the Manchester and Stockport District
- Communications training and briefings for leaders of all ages, from children up, within churches, circuits and districts who identify as being leaders for justice
- Rolling out of Methodist Faith-Based organising pilot and support for Methodists engaging in community organising
- JPIT's Constituency Action Network project to provide training and focus for engagement
- Regular opportunities for churches to engage with one of the priorities, according to the plans developed for each of them by the collaboration groups

A separate resolution at the end of this report sets out how a plan to enable and embed these examples and others in collaboration with key stakeholders may be developed and implemented.

Imagine . . .

216. Imagine for a moment that you, like John of the Book of Revelation, are granted a vision of the future of the Methodist Church.
217. What do you see? A shrinking institution with a limited future . . . or a small, sometimes marginalised, but richly diverse community with a big vision and a deep passion for justice and peace, living out a Methodist Way of Life. A Church where:
- Friendships span the divides of society;
 - Listening to the lived, painful experience of those unjustly treated is normal, informing prayer and action;
 - There is repentance for failures in perpetuating or benefiting from injustice;
 - Children and adults are safe from abuse and exploitation;
 - All are valued and treated with respect;
 - Discrimination in all its forms is challenged;
 - Christians act together with partners to seek justice and peace;
 - Compassion for those in need inspires care and empowers action for structural change;

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- There is a desire to be and go beyond being a net zero Church to create grace spaces for flourishing;
- Refugees and those seeking asylum are welcomed, supported and offered solidarity;
- Members regularly meet with their MP to share stories and seek change;
- Children and young people are recognised, encouraged and supported as justice leaders and empowered to lead worship and action with all generations joining them in their work;
- A community pantry, offering affordable food, is hosted at the church, but owned by the local community;
- A truly affordable housing project is led by the community, providing safe and warm homes;
- Opportunities are sought to speak into the public square and engage in acts of prophetic witness;
- Worship allows for painful lament and deeply felt intercession, as well as thanksgiving and praise;
- The Connexion uses its combined strength to engage with its justice priorities;
- The bonds between people, communities, nations, generations, and all living things are enhanced;
- Our hope in God is continually renewed and our passion for the carrying the good news is bold, sharing the story, and holding social action and social justice, equally in our hands.

The angel of Methodism says to its churches: 'this may be so, if my people are faithful to their calling.'

Section 7: Resolutions

***RESOLUTIONS

- 12/1. **The Conference adopts the Report, and commends it to the Methodist Church for prayerful study and action throughout the Connexion.**
- 12/2. **The Conference directs the Methodist Council to agree a plan to enable and embed the proposals and suggestions set out between paragraphs 210 and 215 of the report in collaboration with key stakeholders, and oversee its implementation.**

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- 12/3. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to review at least every five years through a transparent and participative process the Principles, Priorities and Practices adopted in this report to ensure that they still meet the needs of the Methodist Church and the world.**
- 12/4. The Conference thanks all those who participated in and contributed to the Walking with Micah project.**

Appendix 1

Members of Walking with Micah Reference Group

The Revd Dr Roger Walton (chair)
The Revd Mandy Briggs
The Revd Ken Howcroft
The Revd Helen Kirk
Dr Daleep Mukarji
Deacon Kerry Scarlett
Ms Ella Sibley-Ryan
The Revd Arlington Trotman

Accompaniers appointed by the Faith and Order Committee

The Revd Dr Catrin Harland-Davies
The Revd Dr Mike Long
The Revd Dr Caroline Wickens