

London Methodism

Report of the Working Party on London Methodism

1. Background

1.1 In response to memorials from the four London Districts, the 2000 Conference instructed the Methodist Council to work closely with the London Districts on the impact of regionalisation for the shape of Methodist work within the region .

1.2 As a result the Methodist Council set up a working party which began meeting in January 2001 [*Members are listed in Appendix 1*]. After consultation it adopted the following terms of reference:

"The working party will endeavour, in consultation with the London Districts and circuits and our ecumenical partners in London:

1. To evaluate the present patterns of Methodist work in the region in terms of their ability to sustain a coherent strategy for mission and to engage with the needs and opportunities of London, as focused by the work of the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA)*.
2. To explore alternative policies and/or structures which might enable Methodism to relate more effectively to London and the South-East region as a whole.
3. To recommend practical means by which any proposed alternatives might be implemented."

1.3 In beginning its work the working party invited initial contributions from various Methodist and ecumenical partners within the region. In response to the issues identified it drew up a number of options which it tested with the London District Synods and Circuits in September and October 2001 — as anticipated in the Interim Report which appeared as part of the Methodist Council report to the Conference of 2001. That extensive process of consultation informs the Recommendations that conclude this report.

2. Towards a Vision

2.1 The proposal to review the current pattern of Methodist work in London was triggered by the creation of a new pattern of governance for London, with the election of a Mayor and Greater London Assembly in May 2000. This development symbolised a political intention to reaffirm the identity of Greater London* as a coherent regional entity. Many bodies — including the Churches - must now respond to the challenge to consider their own institutional patterns across the GLA.

2.2 It soon became clear to the working party, however, that a number of other distinct considerations give this issue additional significance for the mission of Methodism.

2.2 1 The wider Government policy of Regionalisation

The current *process of regionalisation* - embodied in the creation of eight Government Regions each with its own Regional Development Agency in addition to the GLA - offers new opportunities for the Churches and other faith communities to engage constructively with the public agenda. Engagement with these new units, however, will require new patterns of denominational representation and partnerships at the regional level.

Each region has its own particular dynamics, but the question about the future shape of Methodism in London is properly part of that wider debate — and inevitably so since the four London Districts find themselves in three Government Regions: the East of England, the South-East of England and London itself.

2.2.2 Ecumenical partnerships

Any engagement with regional bodies will need to be on an ecumenical, if not inter-faith, basis. Currently, however, levels of ecumenical co-operation and innovation vary enormously within the area of the four London Districts. Some significant pointers to future ecumenical co-operation, however, do exist:

- In some parts of the region beyond London conversations about Ecumenical Dioceses are taking place.
- Across London there is a network of ecumenical borough deans* designed to help churches engage together in local and borough-wide issues.
- The Churches in London have established two important fora: the London Church Leaders Group*, where Church leaders confer informally; and the London Churches Group for Social Action*, a unit to facilitate shared civic and social responsibility work among the Churches.

Whilst no two denominations share co-terminous boundaries in Greater London at present, it is significant that in their recent structural reviews the Baptist Union has retained the integrity of Greater London as a single unit in its planning and the Salvation Army has created a new Central London Division. In addition all ecumenical conversations have indicated the possible convergence of work at the borough level.

2.2.3 Identity

The issues surrounding the creation of an identity for Methodism in the SE corner of England are as complex as they are real. The scale and diversity of London and the wider area covered by the present four London Districts preclude any simple solution, as do the many links - people, economics, transport - which daily weave a web of mutual dependency across the area as a whole.

Nonetheless our current arrangements work against the creation of any identity for London Methodism in two very significant and detrimental respects:

- The centre of gravity of each of the four London Districts - in terms of geography, number of members and representation - lies outside the M25. As a consequence the specific concerns of London are likely to be minority interests within any one District despite their significance for the SE of England as a whole.
- Most of the churches of inner London, and increasingly those of outer London, have multi-ethnic congregations, many of which currently experience significant growth. The present structures, however, provide little opportunity for the cultural diversity which typifies so much of London Methodism to be recognised and celebrated in any one place. As a result participation of many London Methodists within the wider Church is restricted.

2.2.4 Local Mission

Each of the preceding factors has implications for the wider mission of the Church in the SE corner of England but there are significant issues of local mission too.

Whilst it is true that there is a variety of contexts for mission within London, there is undeniably a much greater similarity and coherence of work among many circuits and churches within London than between the widely disparate sectors of the current Districts.

A clearer and more consistent focus on mission within London as a whole would also strengthen the work of local churches and circuits and would enable a more strategic approach to wider London issues than is currently evident. Many local communities in London focus a number of major social issues quite sharply — e.g. deprivation, homelessness, racism, policing and crime — and it is here where innovative and collaborative responses are most urgently required.

2.3 As a result, the working party began to formulate a vision of work across the four London Districts that would enable a positive response to these challenges and opportunities. Such a vision would involve:

- deploying existing leadership resources so that they relate effectively to three Government Regions
- seeking greater congruence with ecumenical structures and initiatives
- addressing the common concerns and cultural identity of London Methodists
- enhancing the Church's mission both locally and across London as a whole.

3. Defining the Options

Arising from this analysis the working party offered to the Synods and circuits of the London Districts five possible options which might enable these issues to be more adequately addressed. These range

from the very modest to the most comprehensive, both in the amount of change required and in the predicted effect, as follows:

3.1 Develop and formalise the **representative leadership roles** of the four London Chairs in relation to the three regional bodies.

3.2 Redefine the role of the **London Committee Secretary** as a more representative focus for London Methodism.

3.3 Extend the strategic and co-ordinating role of the **London Committee***.

3.4 Establish a **Methodist Assembly for London**, with executive authority delegated by the four London Districts.

3.5 Reshape the existing London Districts into **Regional Districts** — one relating to Greater London; one to the Eastern region; one to the South-Eastern region — recognising that to be most effective the latter two Districts would need to confer with those neighbouring Districts which also fall within those two Government Regions.

In addition, attention was drawn to the evident importance of the London Boroughs and encouragement was given to the conscious development of **borough identity** among the London churches and circuits.

4. Results of the Consultation

In September and October 2001 members of the four London Synods and the 101 circuits within the London Districts were invited to comment on these five options and to indicate which of them ought to be actively developed [*responses are analysed in Appendices 2 and 3*].

In assessing the responses it became clear that whilst none of the options was ruled out, the clearest preference by far was for a serious exploration of 3.5, the creation of Regional Districts. This response and the accompanying comments have been interpreted by the working party to indicate a sense among many within the four Districts that:

4.1 Regionalisation is a reality which the Church must address and which puts our long-standing conversations about boundaries into a new framework.

4.2 The identity, needs and mission opportunities of Methodism in London require an effective response.

4.3 Such a response needs to be comprehensive and not partial.

4.4 The commitment of time and energy involved in carrying through major structural changes at District level has to be set against the hidden but real costs of the inefficient and ineffective aspects of the present structures.

5. Conclusion: A Way Forward

In response to the above considerations we propose that:

5.1 From a date to be specified there will be in the SE of England a reorganisation of the present four London Districts, as a step towards the concept of regional Districts. The emergence of a regional District would require a new model — not a version of an existing District 'writ large'. It would be an opportunity to 'do things differently' in terms of S.O. 400A [see Appendix 5] and to provide a strategic focus for the mission of the Church in relation to the key issues of the region. It might be led by a regional chair in collaboration with a small 'cabinet' or by a co-ordinating leadership group.

5.2 A clear component of that reorganisation would be a **London Regional District**, coterminous with the GLA, to comprise approximately

- 45 circuits
- 20,000 members

5.3 A '**Home Counties**' District would be formed, comprising roughly the areas of the present London NW and London NE Districts which fall outside the GLA. It would comprise approximately

- 28 circuits
- 17,000 members

Its leadership would need to work collaboratively with the Chairs of the East Anglia and Oxford and Leicester Districts to enable Methodist engagement with the East of England Government Region.

5.4 A '**Southern Counties**' District will be formed, comprising roughly the areas of the present London SW and London SE Districts which fall outside the GLA. It will comprise approximately

- 28 circuits
- 17,000 members

Its leadership would need to work collaboratively with the Chairs of the Southampton and Oxford and Leicester Districts to enable Methodist engagement with the SE of England Government Region. [See Appendices 4a and 4b for illustrative maps.]

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Conference of 2002 be invited to endorse the outline proposals in Section 5 of this report.

6.2 That detailed work be carried out, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, the London Committee, the four London Districts and their circuits, the East Anglia, Southampton and Oxford and Leicester Districts, to produce a report for the Conference of 2003 which addresses, inter alia, the following:

- The nature and consequent leadership and structure of the proposed Districts;

- The financial implications of the proposed new Districts;
- The equitable transfer of property, assets, liabilities and responsibilities (e.g. lay employment) from the current four London Districts to the proposed Districts;
- Implications for circuits that currently straddle the Regional boundaries
- Implications for the London Mission Fund* and for the role of the London Committee

and which proposes a date for implementation.

7. Resolution

The Conference adopts the Report.

Glossary

Ecumenical Borough Dean - Borough Deans are appointed by each of the main denominations in each of the 33 London Boroughs to liaise on the Churches' behalf with the civic and statutory authorities within the Borough.

Greater London - The area defined by the 33 Boroughs, approximating to the area within the M25 motorway.

Greater London Authority [GLA] -The Mayor and Assembly - first elected in May 2000 - who together have certain strategic responsibilities for London governance.

London Church Leaders Group - Representative Leaders of the main Churches (including the Chairs of two of the four London Districts) who meet occasionally for prayer and fellowship. Its ongoing work is sustained by an Executive Committee.

London Churches Group for Social Action - An ecumenical network that co-ordinates the Churches' responses to civic issues and issues of social responsibility. The group is chaired by a Church leader and is served by an Executive and Policy Officer.

London Committee - The Committee is appointed formally to "raise and administer the London Mission Fund". Representing the four London Districts - including all four Chairs - it is able to develop a more co-ordinated approach to work in London and the South-East. Its work and the wider concerns of the region are served by an office comprising the London Committee Secretary, a Finance and Grants Officer and a PA.

London Mission Fund - A Fund - benefiting from historic investments and annual contributions from the four London Districts and their churches - that resources work within those Districts, mainly through property and ministry grants.

Appendix 1

Members of the Working Party

- *Chair* Mr Tony Colman MP
- *Secretary* Mr Chris Linford

District Representatives

- *London NE* Miss Jane Dansie, Mr Andy Ujah
- *London NW* The Revd David Read, Ms Shirley Woolford
- *London SW* The Revd Sheryl Anderson, The Revd Calvin Samuel

London SE Ms June Givanni, The Revd Cameron Kirkwood

Other Representatives

- *Methodist Council* The Revd David Deeks
- *Methodist Inner-City Churches Group* The Revd Cathy Bird
- *London Committee* The Revd Dr Stuart Jordan

Appendix 2

[table included in Conference Agenda papers only]

Appendix 3

Summary Of Non-Synod Responses To Working Party Paper

1. London North-East

Circuits (five responses)

One, unspecified, discussed at Special Meeting and supported Regional Districts with no comments.

1/8 Stoke Newington discussed in Circuit Meeting, and were supportive of a Regional District for London.

1/12 Enfield had circuit consultation, and supported Regional Districts with the following comments:

- No other option was worthy of consideration
- Importance of doing detailed work before final consultation
- Two non-London Districts would not be a satisfactory arrangement
- Importance of renewed vision, flexibility and concentration on mission

- Need for a wider review of structures
- Non-London areas are important too

1/19 Bishops Stortford discussed in Leadership Team. Majority view in favour of Regional Districts but:

- Not happy to join with remnant of London NW — have more in common with East Anglia
- Need for a wider review of boundaries and structures

1/28 Colchester. Circuit Meeting expressed majority view in favour of Regional Districts with no supporting comments.

2. London North-West

Circuits (eight responses)

2/1 West London Mission. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts:

- Encouraged the Committee to consider a fall-back position
- Recognised that Borough relationships were an issue of differing importance in different areas

2/2 London Mission (North and Central). Circuit Meeting appears to have had difficulty in grappling with what it saw as a rather wordy document. Supported extension of the role of the London Committee and its Secretary.

2/7 Finchley and Hendon. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts with no comments.

2/22 Bedford (North). Circuit Meeting:

- Supported the setting up of a London Assembly
- Was reluctant to remove the mix by which it felt it gained from the current structure
- Recognised the significant numbers of suburban members who are part of the London workforce
- Reluctantly acknowledged the value of London Methodism being able to work together

2/23 Bedford (South) and Ampthill. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts but:

- Urged that non-London circuits be not forgotten
- Urged a wider review of boundaries and structures

2/25 Leighton Buzzard and Stewkley. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts but:

- Felt that there were wider implications and urged a more far-reaching review

- Thought local government structures should be important
- Stressed the importance of ecumenical relationships
- Stressed the importance of recognising transport links
- Urged that the process should not be rushed but should achieve the right result

2/28 Amersham. General Purposes Committee supported Regional Districts and recognised the need to be radical.

2/30 Thame and Watlington. Leadership Team supported Regional Districts, pointing out the complexity of local relationships in more rural areas.

Personal responses

One letter from a member in High Wycombe, stressing the importance of relating to regional structures; i.e. High Wycombe gets more value from its links with SE region than from those with circuits in, say, Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire. He also recognises the possible importance of relationships at Borough level.

One letter from a supernumerary minister supporting the inception of a London District.

One letter from a member on behalf of Caledonian Road, supporting the Circuit's response, pointing out that transport links with areas in London NW are often much better than with other parts of London, and that the mix of city, rural etc. is valuable.

3. London South-West

Circuits (nine responses)

3/1 Westminster. Open Meeting supported Regional Districts but:

- Felt the non-London circuits should continue to be organised as four Districts
- London District should be based on the existing London Committee Secretary and structure
- Circuits on the edges should be given a choice

3/14 Tooting. Staff supported Regional Districts, but expressed some concern over cost implications.

3/18 Sutton. Leadership Team supported London District in principle but:

- Was concerned that the circuits on the edges were not appropriate to be linked with the city
- Recognised that boundary anomalies are rife at present
- Questioned what the role of the District should be

- Recognised the value of realignment along Borough lines in some places
- Questioned whether the effort of restructuring could be justified

3/20 Dorking and Horsham. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts but:

- Stressed the need for any solution to be based on vision etc.
- Felt that bigger Districts for the non-London areas would not be helpful

3/21 Mid-Sussex. Special meeting supported a London District but:

- Raised the question of the role of the London Committee in any revised structure
- Felt that the non-London circuits should continue to be organised as four Districts

3/26 Guildford. Circuit Meeting supported the principle of Regional Districts, but:

- Questioned whether London was too big for one District
- Stressed the importance of existing relationships which in many cases crossed the M25

3/29 Woking and Walton were unable to set up a conversation within the time specified.

3/30 Aldershot etc. Superintendent and Stewards broadly supported the inception of a London Assembly were unable to offer any more thoughts without being given detailed proposals.

3/31 S E Berks. Circuit Meeting supported the principle of a London District but:

- Expressed concern about the impact on the remaining circuits
- Were concerned that the existing sense of belonging (to the LSW District) would be lost under the proposed structure
- Stressed the importance of ecumenical relationships
- Felt a review of all boundaries etc. should be called for

Personal responses

The District Superintendents, meeting together, made the following points:

- The Synod debate had been impaired by a lack of knowledge
- Debate without having detailed proposals was difficult
- The principle of a single District for London was supported
- The non-London circuits should continue to be organised as four Districts

3/15 Kingston-upon-Thames encouraged individual responses from members of Circuit Meeting, five of which were received:

- Two supported the principle of Regional Districts
- There was some support for basing any solution on the London Committee
- There was some recognition of the value of Borough relationships
- Concern was expressed at the cost implications

4. London South-East

Circuits (seven responses)

4/2 Brixton. A special meeting expressed no majority view and broadly no real interest. The Superintendent felt that the churches were very parochial in outlook and had no real sense of Circuit identity, thus anything wider did not fire their imagination.

4/4 Streatham and Dulwich. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts, and saw the value of Borough relationships.

4/5 Sydenham and Forest Hill. Circuit Meeting received the report but had no enthusiasm for debating it.

4/13 Croydon. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts, and saw the value of Borough relationships.

4/17 Tunbridge Wells. Circuit Meeting supported Regional Districts and:

- Recognised the importance of Borough relationships in some areas
- Questioned the wisdom of restructuring in response to fluid local government organisation
- Stressed the importance of ecumenical relationships

4/19 Hastings etc. Leadership Team supported Regional Districts and:

- Recognised that Borough relationships were a matter of local importance in some areas
- Were concerned about the boundary issues for non-London circuits
- Stressed the importance of ecumenical relationships

4/26 Dover & Deal. Leadership Team:

- Recognised the need to strengthen the effectiveness of Methodism in London
- Felt that outer-London circuits often had more in common with the provinces than the city

- Borough relationships were likely to be important in London though less so elsewhere
- Stressed the importance of basing future solutions on vision and mission strategy rather than on financial constraints

Personal responses

One letter from a minister in the Bromley Circuit:

- Recognised the need to re-think District boundaries
- Questioned the role of the District
- Stressed that places outside London are important too

4/11 Orpington Circuit encouraged individual responses from members of Circuit Meeting. Seven were received of which only one carried detailed comments. These broadly supported the principles of Regional Districts and organisation to take account of Borough relationships.

5. Summary

5.1 Levels of response

Of the 101 circuits invited, 29 responded. Fifteen of these discussed the document in Circuit Meeting and five held special meetings to deal with it. Seven dealt with it in another regular forum (Leadership team, GP, Staff Meeting etc.) and one response indicated that it had not been possible to cover it within the time scale offered.

Two further circuits encouraged Circuit Meeting members to respond individually, and a total of twelve responses were received by that route. Four other individuals wrote letters of response, one of which was apparently as a result of discussion in a local church setting.

Further responses were received from the meeting of the London South-West District Superintendents, and from the M I C C G (London).

5.2 Nature of response

Overall, it was clear that there was significant majority support for the principle of setting up a regional District for the London region. Underlying this support, a number of points were repeatedly stressed; for example:

- The need for any restructuring to be based on a vision, and on a strategy for mission
- The importance of care over the restructuring of the areas outside the London region. In many cases the setting up of Districts on a regional basis outside London was not seen as a satisfactory solution. All this points to the need for detailed conversation at local level in all areas of the four Districts

- The importance of recognising ecumenical relationships in any restructuring
- Care to be taken over cost implications
- Borough relationships were worth exploring in some areas, but that this should be a matter of local decision

These appeared to be leading implicitly, and in some cases explicitly, to the view that no solution can be introduced without addressing three particular questions:

1. What are the boundary implications for wider Methodism? Is this the time to reconsider the entire geographical and structural nature of British Methodism?
2. What is a District? What is its role in Methodism? Is this the time to review what a District is set up to deliver?
3. What is London? Is there a case for thinking that many of the outer-London churches and circuits have more in common with provincial areas than with inner London? Is it the right way forward to tie Methodism to the area within the M25 simply because that is the secular region?

Appendix 5

Standing Order 400A

Nature and Purposes (of the District)

1. The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns. The District serves the Local Churches and Circuits and the Conference in the support, deployment and oversight of the various ministries of the Church, and in programmes of training. It has responsibility for the evaluation of applications by Local Churches and Circuits for approval of or consent to their proposals, when required, or for assistance from district or connexional bodies or funds. Wherever possible the work of the District is carried out ecumenically. The District is thus an expression, over a wider geographical area than the Circuit, of the connexional character of the Church.
2. Since every member in the District is as such a member of the Methodist Missionary Society, the purposes of the District include the promotion of understanding of and support for the work of the Society to the end that every member may share actively in world mission.