**York Circuit Council**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2024**

**at Huntington Methodist Church**

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| **1.** | **Welcome and Opening Devotions:** We opened the meeting with a song from India entitled “Jesus, we surrender ourselves to you”.  We thought of some of the very innovative slogans that are used by the charity “All We Can” in its work with various partners around the world, as well as what we can learn from them. We thought about how this might relate to our own mission, and especially our “ethos” and “culture”, and our partnerships with others. Listening to people on the ground is vital. |
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| **2.** | **Preliminary Business** |
|  | * **Voting Membership of the Meeting (26)**   Revd David Bidnell (Chair), Revds Rory Dalgliesh, John Hayward, Dr John Schofield, Deacon Judith Stoddart.  Janet Bowling, Nick Dawson, Vic Paylor, Ann Smallwood, Sally Gall, Sue Gill, John Freeman, Graham Langton, Richard Grosberg, Malcolm Parker, David Anderson, Russ Smallwood, Ruth Schofield, Richard Storer, Rosamond Carter, Sheila Middleton, Karen Valentine, David Whittaker, June Taylor, Chris Jarrett, Stephen Leah (Secretary)   * **Non-voting Guests** present at the meeting: Angie Creswick, Lois Cross, Lorraine Jones, Heather Louis, Louisa Taylor, Amy Shephard * **Apologies for Absence:** Revd Elizabeth Cushion, Revd Andy Lindley, Christopher Rouse, Peter Kitchin * **Letters of Greeting to be sent:** * Kathryn Wright on the sad loss of her father * Revd Leslie Newton who has recently been unwell and away from work. He is now back working part time as he seeks to come back to full health. |
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| **3.** | **Minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2023** |
|  | * **Approval of the minutes**   The minutes were approved and signed by the Chair   * **Matters arising**   David gave an update on the sale of Stillington, about which there had been discussion in the previous meeting. The sale will take place, but has not been carried out yet. In order to work out the best way of addressing the issues raised in the last meeting, the Circuit Leadership Team believes that we need to wait until we get a clearer idea as what the proceeds will be that will come from the sale. We will therefore discuss this at a later date. |
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| **4.** | **Circuit Consultation Task Group Report and Proposals** |
|  | Introducing this item of the agenda, David reminded us that the proposals were coming not from the Task Group but the Circuit Leadership Team. He thanked, on the Circuit Council’s behalf, Rev Graham Jones for his work on them with the Task Group   * Ann Smallwood introduced the proposals. She said that they came initially in response to a request from the Circuit Council. She reminded us of the Terms of Reference and of the many stages of consultation that had taken place, and of the listening, discussion and prayer that had been involved in distilling people’s responses and the way forward. The Task Group have felt challenged, as well as the weight of responsibility but also the willingness of so many to accept change. The group had understood that for many it was more than just addressing the financial deficit but also lifting the burdens of Governance. The proposals would not affect the Assessment on Churches. There is however, the time pressure of the start of the Stationing process for 2025, which is in May 2024. The proposals are not a downsizing process, but rather a creative “framework” for a direction of travel. “Love is at the core, rooted in Jesus”.   David said that due to the Stationing timetable, the CLT will need to come to the June 2024 Circuit Council with firm proposals. We dealt with the proposals according to their 3 sections in the paper that was distributed:   * **Governance Proposals:** In response to a question it was clarified that the “Church Governing bodies” that it is proposed to merge would be Church Councils. Further clarification was requested as to whether this means merging Church Councils per se, or delegating particular functions such as financial matters or Safeguarding. In response it was said that responsibility lies with Church Councils even if they do delegate the management of particular areas.   It was suggested that it would be good to find out the experiences of other Circuits that have merged Churches. Sally Gall described the experience in Villages Together and said that they had had positive and negative experiences. One of the things to watch out for is ensuring that as the new Church Council is now dealing with multiple buildings, that the extra amount of work that could fall on particular officers is recognised. David agreed, but said that if managed well, it could reduce isolation as previous officers of individual Churches work together and support each other in that work.  Rory said that implementing the proposals would be complex work involving many aspects including relational, organisational and others. He said that even though the CLT will lead on the work, all of us in the Circuit Council are trustees and so need to show the CLT our support. David agreed and said that there will be an ongoing dialogue between the Circuit Council and CLT. There is even a possibility that on occasion, the Circuit Council will need to meet more frequently.  There then followed some discussion around the experiences of different Circuits that had merged Churches. John Hayward in particular shared his knowledge of the experience in the Barnsley Circuit.  **The meeting then agreed to the Governance proposals as originally distributed**   * **Buildings Proposals:** David introduced this section by saying that a key question will be how we do an audit so as to make sure it is fair. John Schofield explained the inadvertent bias that could come in a questionnaire and suggested that we ask someone outside the group, with appropriate expertise, to design it. Angie said that there are tools that can help. We should also include “people” information as buildings are tools for the mission enacted by people. We should also consider sustainability. David said that in relation to links between Churches, these might not necessarily be geographical but could be based on shared work or types of locality.  It was pointed out that there could be additional futures for buildings in addition to the ones the paper suggests such as renting or community use. Nick said that the consultation suggested that whereas a case could be made for each building that it should be kept, there is a feeling we have too many buildings overall. The Circuit must not be seen to be in the property business.   **The meeting then agreed to the Buildings proposals as originally distributed.**   * **People Proposals:** David said that after discussion, there needs to be some tightening up of some of the words in the proposal. These changes are described below, alongside another change that came as a result of the discussion.   It was asked if the Carecent constitution might need to be changed, and further who has the right to do this. This is a question that will need to be addressed.  It was suggested that the responsibility suggested for the new “city-centre chaplain” to address the causes of poverty and homelessness might be too big. It was, however, explained that the role seeks to develop some of Deacon Judith’s work. It was also explained that this relates to networking and is not a requirement for the appointee to solve poverty and homelessness. There is also the element of how to work ecumenically. In discussion, the word “would” in the text was changed to “could”, as shown below.  The People Proposals were put to the meeting, with point 2 changed as below, in which new text is in ***bold*** and deleted text is ~~crossed out~~.  “The Circuit Council agrees that, in collaboration with ***the*** Carecent ***Executive******Committee****,* a ‘city centre chaplain’ role should be developed, with funding both by Carecent ***Designated Funds*** and the sale of city centre properties. The post-holder’s responsibilities ~~would~~ ***could*** include seeking to address some of the causes of poverty and homelessness.”  **The meeting then agreed to the People proposals as amended.**   * **Final points:** There was discussion on the final paragraph of the proposals and whether this means that the people listed will make decisions on behalf of the Circuit Council. David assured the meeting that this will not be the case and that the CLT will not make any decisions in this area without the Circuit Council agreeing. The next steps will involve discussion by the 3 groups of the Staff, the Circuit Stewards and the Circuit Leadership Team.   David said that the Circuit Council has now agreed to the proposals as amended. We as a Circuit Council therefore take ownership of them and all were asked to go back to their Church Councils and advocate enthusiastically for them so as to encourage members at a local Church level.  **The full text of the proposals, as amended and then agreed, is given as an Appendix below these minutes.** |
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| **5.** | **Eco Circuit and Net Zero** |
|  | Lorraine Jones, from the Eco Task Group, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the work to become a more Eco friendly Circuit. Some highlights are noted for the minutes:  12 Churches have now registered for Eco Church and 7 have achieved Bronze. The hard work of all who have achieved this recognition was emphasised, and was requested to be noted in the minutes.  The Circuit is also now on the way to achieving Bronze status. For example, we need 10% of our Churches to also have achieved Bronze, but we have exceeded that with 24%. We have a dedicated team and Environmental policy, the Circuit Hub has achieved Bronze status, we have ethical investments, environmental issues are embedded in the work of Local Preachers and ministers, we work with other denominations and we celebrate our achievements, such as via the Circuit News.  We thought about the Connexional goals, which include the commitment that by 2030 all travel, electricity and gas directly funded by the Church will have Net Zero emissions. The District commitment is that we will be part of a Net Zero Carbon District by 2040. This later date is because Net Zero includes not just travel, but all church buildings. The District obtained funding for a Net Zero Officer and has established a Net Zero Programme Board, who provide invaluable expertise.  In the Circuit, we are liaising with the Net Zero Officer as well as doing work to continually review the Environmental policy and the changing needs of churches and communities. We are looking forward to the Circuit taking part later this year in York Environment Week. The presentation outlined so much more about the work that is taking place.  David expressed gratitude on behalf of the Circuit for this presentation and for all the work that takes place to help us meet our responsibilities towards the environment. |
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| **6.** | **Finance Report** |
|  | Nick Dawson, the Circuit Treasurer, spoke to the written Finance report that had been circulated prior to the meeting   * **Approval of accounts for 2022/23**   Nick highlighted that there were some differences from the numbers in the December 2023 Circuit Council, due to extra factors related to our assets and Circuit property. The size of the loss of £296K relates to calculations around the Connexional levy on assets if they are sold. If assets are sold, the levy is in practice subtracted from them, meaning that the Circuit would never receive the full amount. Discussion is taking place as to whether there should be a full re-evaluation of our property for their asset value to be recorded without the levy.  A summary of the financial position is given on page 1 of Nick’s report, and thanks were expressed from the floor for the clarity with which it is presented.  **The Circuit Council agreed to the resolution that: “The Circuit Council is asked to approve the Report and Accounts for 2022/23, note the Audit Findings and authorise the filing of the Report and Accounts with the Charity Commission.”**  The report stated that the February accounts have not yet been reconciled. However, after reconciling the first quarter’s accounts (September to November 2023) it is believed the deficit will be less for this year than expected. This is mostly due to the District Assessment being less than anticipated.  **The Circuit Council agreed to the resolution that: “The Circuit Council is asked to note the updated financial position of the Circuit for 2023/24.”**   * **Assessment for 2024/25**   The proposed assessment for 2024/25 was discussed at a meeting with the Church Treasurers at the end of January 2024. The proposed increase, based on the Consumer Price Increase was 4.1%. Further details are given in the report. The consensus of the meeting was that this would be challenging but was a fair request. Church Treasurers are consulting with their Church Councils and responses are still coming in. The majority of Churches have indicated they can pay this increase, although 2 churches that have previously requested a reduction have done so this year as well.  **The Circuit Council agreed to the resolution that: “The Circuit Council is asked to approve the assessment increase of 4.1% for 2024/25 as outlined in the separate document, and to delegate to the CLT the final assessment for those Churches requesting a reduction.”**   * **Budget for 2024/25**   The budget was presented, along with the key assumptions which are listed in the Finance Report. Nick has also discussed these in detail with John Hayward in order to try to ensure nothing has been forgotten. The financial position is a considerable improvement on previous years and is helped by the reduction in the District Assessment, an expected reduction in staffing, more interest on savings and more lettings. There was a question from the floor as to how we avoid losing sight of the cost of closed buildings. Nick responded that this is carefully considered, although this year we have had income from Trinity which has improved the overall balance.  **The Circuit Council agreed to the resolution that: “The Circuit Council is asked to approve the budget for 2024/25, and to note the expected reduction in the deficit for 2025/26.”**  **The Circuit Council further agreed to the resolution that: “The Circuit Council is asked to approve the increase of 6.8% for all Circuit lay staff effective from 1st April 2024.”**  David expressed the thanks of the meeting to Nick as our Circuit Treasurer and to all of the Church Treasurers. |
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| **7.** | **Lay Employment Management Group Report** |
|  | No separate report was presented. The increase in remuneration for the Circuit lay staff was approved in the Finance Report. |
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| **8.** | **Property Report** |
|  | * **Acomb Project – MTM recommendation from John Middleton**   A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting with the request of Acomb Methodist Church for MTM funding for a roof replacement scheme together with significant environmental work to help meet the District Net Zero target. A paper from the MTM group had also been circulated with its recommendations. These were that **“The MTM Group recommend the following in accordance with the Circuit guidelines:**   * **A grant of £25,000** * **A loan of £20,000 to be repaid in equal quarterly repayments over two years** * **A £30,000 contingency bridging loan should it prove necessary, to be repaid in one year**   **The Circuit Council agreed to the MTM recommendations.**   * **Consents for Acomb**   Property consents had also been requested from Acomb, which did not require MTM funds but did require the approval of the Circuit Council. These were:   * A request for permission to install a fire alarm and upgrade internal doors to meet new regulations. * A request for approval to pursue renovations of its Caretakers bungalow, with a view to leasing on the open market. * A request for approval to pursue £45K in loans over 5 years to fund the bungalow project. * A request for approval to pursue a £300K Net Zero scheme to replace its roof, windows, ceilings, some lighting and install solar panels.   **These consents were approved by the Circuit Council**   * **Property Updates**   A written report had been circulated prior to the meeting. Progress towards the sale of buildings was noted, in particular the completion of the sale of Stillingfleet Methodist Church. This is a significant moment for many.  Angie reported that the Annual Returns are very different this year in that there are additional items for consideration based on things like future plans, sustainability and carbon footprint. It may be important that these are discussed at the Church Councils. Drop-in sessions with Angie or Lois were noted, which are 17th April, 9.30 – 11.30 am at Huntington and 15th May, 9.30 – 11.30 am at Lidgett. |
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| **9.** | **Appointments** |
|  | David Bidnell proposed appointments to the proposals that had been circulated before the meeting. There was just one addition, which was Ann Smallwood to be a member of the Circuit Leadership Team, and one minor amendment which was that the “Circuit Safeguarding Officer” should have been “Circuit Safeguarding Team Leader”. It was also noted that the membership of the Circuit Invitations Committee cannot be known fully at this stage until we know which Churches are involved in Stationing 2025.  **The following appointments were therefore agreed**  **Circuit Council Secretary**  Stephen Leah  **Circuit Treasurer**  Nick Dawson  **Account Signatories**  Nick Dawson, Ann Smallwood, Vic Paylor, Stephen Leah  **CFB Account Signatories**  Nick Dawson  **Circuit Stewards**  Ann Smallwood, Vic Paylor (Property), Nick Dawson (Finance), Sally Gall, Sue Gill, Janet Bowling  **Circuit Safeguarding Team Leader**  John Hayward  **Lay Employment Management Group**  David Bidnell, Andy Lindley, Sally Gall, John Middleton, Nick Dawson, Janet Bowling, David Johnson  **Manse Stewards**  Vic Paylor, Sue Gill, Peter Harrison, Tim Short, John Middleton  **Reps to Circuit Council**  John Freeman (LWP Rep)  **Reps to District Synod (from September 2024)**  Janet Bowling, Sue Gill, Nick Dawson, John Middleton, Lydia Harrison  **Circuit Leadership Team**  David Bidnell, Elizabeth Cushion, John Hayward, Victoria Etherington, Louisa Taylor,  Janet Bowling, Nick Dawson, Vic Paylor, Ann Smallwood, Stephen Leah  **Circuit Invitations Committee**  David Bidnell, Elizabeth Cushion, Rory Dalgliesh, John Hayward, Stephen Leah, Janet Bowling, Vic Paylor, Ann Smallwood, Nick Dawson, Sally Gall, Sue Gill (plus one rep from each of the churches involved – when known)  **MTM Committee**  John Middleton (Convenor), David Bidnell, Nick Dawson, Janet Bowling, Martyn Holman, Peter Metcalf, Frances Postlethwaite, Paul Hudson, Peter Harrison |
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| **10.** | **Reports** |
|  | * **Safeguarding and GDPR**   The report of the Safeguarding Team had been circulated prior to the meeting. This includes various dates and venues for Foundation and Advanced Module Training for us to note. The Safeguarding Policy for the coming year had also been circulated, and **this was agreed.** David said he will therefore sign this after the meeting. Lois also reminded the meeting of the need to sign GDPR by the end of May. The same drop-in sessions as announced for Property are available to discuss GDPR, these being 17th April, 9.30 – 11.30 am at Huntington and 15th May, 9.30 – 11.30 am at Lidgett.   * **Carecent**   It was noted that the current Secretary of the Carecent Executive has completed their term. Carecent therefore requires a new Secretary. The meetings are 4 times a year. Please speak to David or Judith if you are interested or know some who may be able to fulfil this role.   * **Children and Young People**   A written report had been circulated prior to the meeting. As always, the meeting is very grateful for all the good work that takes place amongst our children and young people.   * **LWP meeting – Bible Month**   Bible Month this June, will be based on the Book of Genesis. Ministers will work with their Churches to organise the Plan.  Naomi Prince has a Final Trial Service on 5th April and a 2nd interview at the next LWP meeting. If all goes according to plan, her service of accreditation is expected to be in September.   * **News from the Circuit**   David reported that Andy Lindley has been asked to move to the Ryedale Circuit in order to become their Superintendent this September 2024.  We are delighted for Louisa Taylor that she has been accepted to go to Queens to train as a Presbyter. From our perspective, it also of course means that she will sadly leave our Circuit later this year.  As a result we will have a Circuit Farewell Service for both Andy and Louisa on Sunday 7th July, 10.30 am at Acomb. This will be live streamed.  It was also noted that the Circuit Stewards have agreed to Rory Dalgliesh going to 80% full time equivalent. |
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| **11.** | **Dates and Pattern of Next Meetings** |
|  | * Wednesday 12th June 2024, 7pm: Circuit Council at Haxby and Wigginton * Wednesday 11th September 2024, 7pm: Circuit Council at Haxby and Wigginton * Wednesday 4th December 2024, 7pm: Circuit Council at TBC |
|  | * Sunday 7th July 10.30am Circuit Farewell Service at Acomb |

**Appendix: Circuit Consultation Proposals as Agreed**

Governance Proposals:

1. The York Circuit Council encourages work to begin on merging Church Governing bodies within the Circuit.
2. The Circuit Council directs the Circuit Leadership Team to put together a framework as to how this might happen with the aim of making progress by September 2025.
3. The Circuit Council directs that planning for the resourcing of the Circuit from September 2025 should be on the basis of a reduced number of Church Governing bodies.

Buildings Proposals:

As a guiding principle, the York Circuit Council agrees that there should be a reduction in the number of church buildings in the Circuit and agrees that they should either be affirmed in their current use or sold, or the possibilities of community use in partnership with others should be explored. The use of Circuit properties should also be considered; whether they are still required or should be sold, or put to creative missional use, e.g. housing refugees, housing a non-stipendiary or house for duty ordained minister, housing lay employees and others in a community house etc. To this aim:

1. The Circuit Council encourages an audit to be conducted on every church building in the Circuit.
2. The Circuit Council agrees that an audit should be conducted on all Circuit properties, these being the 10 manses, Aroma Café and flat, as well as the Melbourne Centre and Circuit Hub.
3. The Circuit Council agrees that the income and costs associated with the closed Churches (currently Trinity, Dunnington, New Earswick, Stillingfleet and Stamford Bridge) be ring-fenced from ongoing Circuit finances, and that any deficit from the management of these properties be funded from either the reserves received from these Churches or from the proceeds of a future sale.

People Proposals:

1. The York Circuit Council agrees that staffing (lay and ordained) should be organised in ways that encourages the development and use of specialist gifts and passions.
2. The Circuit Council agrees that, in collaboration with the Carecent Executive Committee, a ‘city centre chaplain’ role should be developed, with funding both by Carecent Designated Funds and the sale of city centre properties. The post-holder’s responsibilities could include seeking to address some of the causes of poverty and homelessness.
3. The Circuit Council agrees that opportunities should be explored for ‘New Places for New People’ seeking to attract connexional funds which are available, e.g. in new housing developments, marginalised communities, online and digital communities etc.
4. The Circuit Council agrees to encourage the development of partnerships with community organisations whose goals are consistent with those of the Methodist Church, including other denominations.

The proposals agreed by the York Circuit Council will be actioned under the direction of the Circuit Leadership Team: Janet Bowling, Nick Dawson, Vic Paylor, Ann Smallwood, David Bidnell, Elizabeth Cushion, Victoria Etherington, John Hayward, Louisa Taylor, Stephen Leah.