

DENBY DALE AND CLAYTON WEST CIRCUIT

CIRCUIT REVIEW 2015

Introduction

The production of this circuit review has been both exhausting and exhilarating. You have worked hard in your churches during Lent, reviewing Christian ministry and preparing presentations for the review team. For this we are grateful, not least because it has given a detailed picture of some really important faith-led mission taking place in Denby Dale and Clayton West. The presentations have been genuinely startling in revealing just how much transformative activity continues to be generated within our circuit by small groups of Christians working together for the good of their communities. We should be justly, yet gently, proud of each other, even as we dedicate such work to God. We should also be concerned to make sure that we pass on our values, our energy and our gospel story to future generations. This, in part, is what the circuit review seeks to achieve. So we are grateful too for your contributions to how we might make our churches more appealing to newcomers.

As a circuit, we should acknowledge our gratitude to Rachel McCallam (Regional Coordinator of the Discipleship, Ministries and Learning Network for the Yorkshire Plus region) and Revd Nick Blundell (West Yorkshire District Mission Enabling Officer), who helped us to structure the review, to listen well and to analyse what we heard with a view to making the recommendations contained in this document. The other members of the review team would also want to thank Ian Morris for carefully noting what has been said and drafting the report that is now available for consultation; and Brian Richardson for his diligence and thoroughness in preparing financial projections for the next ten years. All this sets us on a journey together which we hope, trust and pray will see us furthering our church as *a discipleship movement shaped for mission*.

What happens now:

1. **Please read the report**, especially the conclusions and recommendations, and consult with one another to confirm that what we are recommending is a sensible stewardship of the resources we have and to agree that this is an appropriate way forward for the circuit.
2. **Please feed any comments, observations or criticisms back** to Ian Morris or me by 15th August so that we have a few weeks to consider them ahead of the circuit meeting on 10th September.
3. We intend to put the conclusions and recommendations to the vote at the Circuit Meeting on September 10th. If passed, we will appoint personnel over the ensuing few months to meet the priorities we have identified.

Philip Bee, June 2015

Above all, continue to hold each other in prayer:

*Lord God, we pray for one another in love.
We thank you for the companions with whom we travel on this journey of faith.
May your Spirit challenge us, energise us and strengthen us as we walk.
And may Christ lead our circuit of churches into a future
where we meet joy, confidence and hope.
Be with us we pray.
In Jesus' name
Amen.*

Preamble

A few years ago many circuits in Methodism reorganised by merging and forming new larger structures. It became clear that our circuit, through circumstances beyond our control, was not going to be able to merge with any of our neighbouring circuits. The suggestion was then made that a circuit review would be a useful exercise to establish our future.

We deferred this process until we had a new superintendent minister and when Philip arrived this then became a priority.

The following reasons for a review were identified.

1. **Decline** in membership and attendance. Throughout the circuit fewer people are coming to and involving themselves in the work of our churches. Furthermore the average age of those who are active in the church is increasing. The consequence is that all ten churches in our circuit face closure over the next 5 to 20 years.
2. **Structural**. As a consequence of all this it is hard to fill the lay positions required to function well at both circuit and local church levels.
3. **Staffing**. Our circuit is potentially unattractive to ministers, who do not see themselves as effective when stretched across five churches and may wish to work in a team of more than two.
4. **Financial** It is some time since the circuit has been able to pay for three ministers. Our recent deacon appointment has relied on a District grant and taking money from our reserves. However, dropping to two full time members of staff does release some money.
The circuit has money from the sale of Ingbirchworth.
It has been possible to rent out two unoccupied manses. There has been some initial expense in enabling this, but will provide a further source of income to circuit funds.
It is important that the money from these various sources should be used well for the mission of the church and not simply for maintenance.
5. **Spiritual / Evangelism**. In order to respond to the decline in our churches it is necessary to identify and develop core values to make us attractive to people outside church.

At an early stage it was decided that the review would not consider the merger of this circuit with others or splitting it up. This will be the inevitable consequence of the failure to make any significant changes to the circuit.

Likewise, the review would not consider the closure of any particular church in the circuit. In a similar fashion this will be the consequence of churches failing to develop.

The Process

The Circuit Meeting commissioned the review in December 2014.

The Circuit Review Team

Rev Dr Philip Bee – Chair

Rev Alan Wilthew

Ian Morris – writer

Dianne Hughes

Liz Hill

Brian Richardson

Stuart Merry

Clare Dodsley

District Support was provided by shared work from Rev Nick Blundell and Rachel McCallam.

Rev Stephen Barnett – prayer support

The team met to discuss the strategy of the review and to draw up briefing material for the churches.

A meeting was held with representatives from the churches to explain the process and the presentations required.

A series of meetings were then held in each church with their respective minister to formulate a response and produce the presentation.

Over a two week period starting the 16th March, meetings were held where the churches made their presentations to the Circuit Review Team. After each presentation there was then a discussion with the team about the review issues.

The team then met to collate the responses and to produce their conclusions and recommendations.

This report is available for all in the circuit to read, consider and develop a response. There will be an opportunity for discussion at the June Circuit Meeting. Each church will need to consider its response, its plans for the future and how it might use the resources suggested. It is hoped that the decisions necessary to implement the recommendations can be made at the September Circuit Meeting.

The Circuit

Introduction

Denby Dale and Clayton West Circuit lies to the west of the M1 and occupying an area which approximates to a circle with a radius of 4 mile centred on Denby Dale.

It straddles the boundary between West and South Yorkshire and includes parts of the boroughs of Barnsley, Kirklees, and Wakefield.

There are ten churches in all.

It is a circuit of churches lying within small rural communities. None of these are far from each other but mostly are discrete and separate locations.

Three churches lie within the district of Penistone, a small market town with a population of about 10,000 and their communities are confluent.

St Andrews lies on the High Street close to the centre of Penistone, Springvale is an area to the east of the town centre and Thurlstone and Millhouse Green are communities lying north west of the centre. The church is in Millhouse Green and was formed by merger with the church which was in Thurlstone.

Penistone is within the borough of Barnsley. The other church in Barnsley is in the village of Cawthorne which has a population of about 1,100.

West Bretton is a small village within Wakefield borough and has a population of about 550.

The remaining villages are all in Kirklees. Skelmanthorpe has a population of 4,200, Denby Dale of about 2,200, Clayton West 2,700, Lower Cumberworth 1,200 and Emley 1,800.

There are two presbyters stationed to the circuit.

Each church was asked to make a presentation to the review team based around a number of questions and issues raised by the review team. The following summaries about each church are based largely but not exclusively on their presentations.

Cawthorne

Membership 25

Average Attendance 14 sometimes one or two children

Church Activities Sunday morning worship; weekly coffee mornings (which raise money for charities); special events such as Harvest supper, Christmas bazaar, Village sing.

Other users Young farmers and occasional lettings.

The church is well maintained and in a central position in the village.

There are well developed links with the village Anglican church and regular joint services particularly around church festivals. However, they too are finding it difficult to develop with a diminishing and ageing group of supporters. In spite of the good relationships enjoyed, it is highly unlikely that the two churches could come together as an LEP.

The church's finances are not in a strong position.

The church is successful at attracting people to social occasions such as the Harvest Supper. They have regular coffee mornings which are popular and have raised significant sums of money for various charities; something for which the church is very proud.

In the past there was a youth group but this has now stopped. This happened mainly because key young people grew out of it, new links were not then made and funding ran out.

The church believes that although it is an open and friendly place which is fairly successful at attracting people to come on a social basis they are not good at developing these relationships into Christian discipleship. They would welcome the assistance of someone who could work with newly retired people to do this.

The church expressed concern about its style of worship and felt that it needed updating. However, they acknowledged that the current members preferred a traditional style.

Clayton West

Membership 29

Average Attendance 19

Church Activities Sunday worship; afternoon fellowship fortnightly; Kids Klub fortnightly; Monthly coffee morning; Sunday lunch 2 – 3 times a year and Holiday club every half term + 4 days in August.

Other Users Hobson's chorus, Collectors Club, fun for Kidz Club (monthly from St Augustine's) and Kirklees Refuge Centre.

Whilst the buildings are in good physical condition they are not "user friendly". Access is not easy and a lift would be a great advantage.

Financially they are managing to maintain a balanced budget but have little in reserve.

The church has provided a number of key circuit workers over the years but now age is becoming a limiting factor in what they can do.

There are strong ecumenical links with the URC and with two Anglican churches. There is a joint service every 5th Sunday in a month.

There is a covenant and formal letter of intention with the URC looking towards an eventual union. They have joint services once a quarter on a Sunday and also on a Wednesday. However, the URC church is itself weak and such a union would not materially change the outlook for church.

The church has talented musicians within its community, who can support worship well.

A very successful venture is the Holiday club which happens several times a year. It attracts over 50 children from a wide area. There is disappointment that this does not seem to lead to contacts at other times.

Denby Dale

Membership 40

Average Attendance 25 – 30. 11 Children or Sunday School roll and 20+ families attend Messy Church

Church Activities Sunday morning worship, Emmaus Group, Prayer meetings, Maintenance Group; fortnightly Inspire(craft group) and Kids Kingdom (Sunday School); Monthly Messy Church (Churches together venture) and Coffee Mornings. Also with Churches Together; holiday club, Lent groups, Village Christmas cards and Posada.

Other Users Rainbows, Brownies, Ladies' Choir and French Class. Some occasional users for community meetings.

The building has recently had a major refurbishment which enhances the facilities. However, a major issue about this church is that it is a listed building.

There are strong ecumenical links which have been built up over a number of years. The Messy Church is run as an ecumenical venture. There has recently been a proposal to merge all the churches and function on a single site, possibly one different from all the current church buildings.

Finances are satisfactory.

A number of the members have a major commitment to the Denby Dale Centre which serves local social needs in a number of ways.

Their suggestions for development included talking to lapsed members and contacts and also the involvement of students in an evangelical mission.

Emley

Membership 31

Average Attendance 20 - 24

Church Activities Sunday morning worship; craft café fortnightly; coffee mornings monthly.

Other Users Emley Play School 4 and a half days a week; Emley Drama Group; Keep-fit evening class and some occasional use by local community organisations for committee meetings and as Polling Station.

Relations with the Church of England, St Michael's, are not well developed but it is hoped that this will improve. St Michael's has a children's group.

Finances are satisfactory.

This church continues as a stable traditional church. It has maintained its congregation size over the last twenty years.

The play group are a major user of the premises and the possibility exists of developing stronger links with this.

Lower Cumberworth

Membership 19

Average Attendance 10 there are a few children in families connected to the church.

Church Activities Sunday morning worship; monthly lunches; monthly coffee mornings, some community gatherings such as quiz nights and meals.

Other Users Brownies; triathlon; Keep fit; AA and occasional lettings for community association, polling station, etc. Only available building in the village.

The village is a small community of about 200 houses. Apart from the pub, the church is the only community building in the village.

Although part of Denby Dale Churches Together, they are not enthusiastic about the one church proposition. Their raison d'être is to provide a Christian presence and building in that particular community. They do have regular joint services with Denby Dale Methodist Church.

They are financially sound. They own a property on which they receive rent.

St Andrews

Membership 69

Average Attendance 49 and 4 children

Church Activities Sunday worship; Young church; Shoppers' service; Prayer groups; Inspire craft café; Toddler group; 3 House groups; CAMEO (for people feeling isolated); Tot's praise

Other Users Penistone Organ Concert; Brownies; Guides; Gateway; Young Farmers; Friends of the Earth; Music Box.

St Andrews is a URC/Methodist LEP (Methodist 33 URC 11 and joint 25). The buildings are 25 years old and in good condition but there is a serious lack of parking.

It provides a relatively large proportion of the circuit officers and local preachers.

Apart from the well developed links with the URC there is an active ecumenical group, Churches Together in Penistone, which organises some joint services and activities.

Financially it struggles to run without deficit.

The Mother and Toddlers' group is very successful and this is an area where stronger links could be developed. The church already takes a regular service in a nearby residential

home and occasional services in another. Working with the elderly has been identified as something that could be developed further.

St Andrews has recently embarked on a new venture to help the lonely and isolated by providing a meeting place on a Tuesday morning, CAMEO (Come and meet each other) and a regular monthly all age worship has been organised.

In the past it has had a major role in the youth work of the circuit. This might be built up again but the church favours starting at the bottom and focusing on very young children and their families. Hopefully this may lead to youth work in a few years.

Skelmanthorpe

Membership 66

Average Attendance 30 and a few children

Church Activities Sunday morning worship; "Meet and Eat" monthly; Film club monthly; Wives' Group twice a month and an annual pantomime; Whist drives fortnightly Saturday evenings; annual Christmas Tree Festival with up to 70 local businesses contributing a tree and lasting 3 days. Prayer and Care Group; Posada at Christmas

Other Users Keep fit weekly; Skelmanthorpe Male Voice Choir fortnightly; used for various society meetings.

The premises are a little out of the way from the centre of the community and the structure is somewhat intimidating. The downstairs facilities are not easily accessed from the church.

There are strong and well developed links with the local Anglican Church. However, it seems unlikely that this will progress to any structural union.

Finances are satisfactory.

The church has developed strong links with the community through the prayer link, the Christmas Tree festival and other ventures. They would like to work further with young people and would welcome some support for this.

Springvale

Membership 8

Average Attendance

Church Activities Sunday morning worship and participation in Churches Together in Penistone events. Quarterly coffee mornings

Other Users Rainbows, Razzmatazz, Patchwork, Ladies Group, Sugar Craft and the Penistone Community Church.

The church premises are now being used by the Community Church for their afternoon services. There are now some joint activities.

The members are committed to developing a strong relationship with the local community.

Finances: Having lost a major income from a letting they are now running at a deficit.

The small group of worshippers are exploring new ways of sharing their fellowship and they have also been developing closer links with the Community Church.

Thurlstone and Millhouse Green

Membership 19

Average Attendance 17

Church Activities Sunday morning worship; Knit and natter group; Mother and Toddler group; Luncheon club.

Other Users Premises used by WI, Anglican Church Meetings, Millhouse community group and special services for the primary school.

Formed by the merger of two Methodist Churches on the Millhouse Green site.

They have well developed ecumenical links with St Saviours, the Anglican church and have some combined services.

The luncheon club caters for up to 24 local people by providing a cooked lunch and companionship once a week. There are 4 teams of cooks and 20 people are involved with providing the lunches; some with no other connection to the church.

The Mother and Toddlers group has up to 15 mothers / 21 children from the local housing estate.

Useful links have been made with the local primary school.

Finances: running at a deficit but due to a large legacy have very large reserves.

They see themselves as a very friendly and mutually caring fellowship. In view of the age and limited numbers of members they find it difficult to envisage doing anything more.

However, what they are doing is clearly making an important impact on the local community. The congregation would welcome assistance in further developing work with children and families in the area.

West Bretton

Membership 27

Average Attendance 14

Church Activities Sunday morning worship, Holy Communion on Tuesdays at 10.30 am and a monthly Anglican Evening Prayer.

Other Users Only regular user of premises is a monthly singing group. School uses church for Harvest and Nativity. Other occasional users including other churches for 'away days'.

An Anglican/Methodist LEP established in 1982 (6 Methodist members, 20 C of E and 1 joint).The building underwent major reconstruction in 1993 and the building is “comfortable, friendly and has a spiritual ambience.”

Finances satisfactory.

The church has had a children’s group in the past but the children at the school now are mostly from outside the village. The LEP nature of this church is a major determinant in how this church functions and its future. This is a small village and it is difficult to see many possibilities for growth. On the other hand the building is itself a very unusual and special place which lends itself well to Church retreats, especially given the proximity to the Sculpture Park.

Common Themes

Most of the churches acknowledged a declining membership and attendance. This was identified as a potential threat to their long term viability. Some churches considered their existence in the five to ten year period a matter of doubt. There was thus a general agreement that change was necessary.

The briefing material given to the churches to help prepare their presentations included some suggestions of radical changes to the circuit. The team believes that these have been interpreted differently by different churches and so caution needs to be exercised in drawing overall conclusions.

However, it was clear that the majority of churches did not favour a single church for the circuit even if this was for purely administrative purposes rather than a place of worship. Likewise there was little support for the suggestion of a focus on three centres of activity in the circuit.

There seemed to be a general view that the churches’ future viability depended on engaging with young people. Equally there is view that people within our churches do not know how to make such an engagement and they would like support from someone with expertise. There was therefore some support for the appointment of a “Youth Worker”

Many churches thought that it was important to put the emphasis on families and young children rather than youth. Thus the development would be with those who are very young as they grew up and also with young adults who are their parents. This could be supported by a Children and Families worker.

All the churches expressed some concerns about worship. There were some concerns about preaching. These included the relevance of sermons and suitability for occasions when children were present. Most churches raised the issue of the style of worship. This was also related to the music and a view that altering this could make services more appealing to young people. With this came also a recognition that many in our churches enjoy traditional styles of worship and traditional hymns.

Conclusions

- a) The review has highlighted that there is a great deal of successful and important mission activity happening in our churches. It needs to be widely recognised and affirmed throughout the circuit.
- b) This covers a wide range of ages and activities from Mothers and Toddlers' groups at St Andrews and Thurlstone, Messy Church at Denby Dale, Holiday Clubs to luncheon clubs, coffee mornings and opportunities for meeting for craft and companionship.
- c) The "praying for local businesses" which happens in the Skelmanthorpe, Denby Dale, and Penistone areas makes an important contact with the community.
- d) There is a substantial commitment in time and effort from members to the Denby Dale Centre which is a major piece of work serving the community. The circuit has supported this financially over several years and this has been an important point in enabling them to obtain a District grant. This is an area of work that the circuit should continue to support including an ongoing financial commitment.
- e) In the past churches had more than one service a day and services at times other in the morning on Sunday. Now all ten churches have a Sunday service at 10.30 am and it is a problem to find preachers to fill all these appointments. There are a substantial number of Readers' services and Own Arrangements on each plan. The newer local preachers are unable to offer the number of appointments that were filled by those no longer available and so the problem is likely to become worse. In addition the ministers find it difficult to keep in touch with their congregations when they can take a service at any one of their five churches only twice a quarter.
- f) One solution to this problem would be to change the times of service. If this was applied to a pair of churches then one could have a service at 9.30 am for example and another at 11.00 am. It might be that the earlier service was more convenient for some families. Our ministers could then preach at two churches on a Sunday.
- g) An alternative approach is to combine services in one place. This is happening regularly with Denby Dale and Lower Cumberworth and less frequently in the Penistone section. A more frequent pattern of shared services and one that involved the whole circuit would ease the pressure on the plan but would provide a less satisfactory solution to the issue of ministerial contact with the churches.
- h) The fact that churches are making some comments about the standard of worship indicates that there are problems with the provision of preaching and reducing the number of services might help.
- i) A suggestion that has been made is that churches could watch on a computer projection system by 'streaming' on the internet, a service taking place elsewhere. Modern IT systems provide a range of possibilities for enhancing worship. Some churches have computers and projection systems whilst others do not. It would be valuable if all churches had access to the internet and a modern IT system including a projection facility. It would be helpful if this was a consistent system throughout the

circuit so that those taking the service could be familiar with its operation and so not reliant on a variable local support.

- j) A fundamental feature of Methodism has always been small group activity, the class system. Some churches have some successful house groups but sharing fellowship in small groups ought to be a part of church life. This is perhaps something that all the churches in the circuit should address.
- k) The changes that are needed to prevent decline and make our churches more interesting, relevant and appealing to those who, currently have nothing or little to do with them, cannot all be matters of circuit direction. Each church needs to consider its own pattern of worship and the culture of church life. Churches need to reflect on this as part of this review and their responses need to form part of the overall way forward that emerges from the review process.
- l) As churches consider such things as alternative forms of worship, changing their church activities, meeting in small groups it may be helpful for them to have expert advice and experience of what others are doing. A small group within the circuit could organise these opportunities.
- m) Singing the Faith is the contemporary Methodist hymn book and adopting this throughout the circuit would be one way of modernising our worship and hymnody.
- n) Good stewardship of our financial resources means that we should spend the money we have in ways that may build up the work of the church and help others. Simply keeping it “for a rainy day” sounds like the man who buried the one talent.
- o) There is a wish for both a Children and Families worker and for Youth work. If work with small children was successful then in a few years there would be a need for youth work in addition to any work that was undertaken initially. It would be encouraging and more attractive to someone employed in such a position if they were not working alone. It therefore seems a good idea to aim to appoint more than one person to cover these areas of work. It might be appropriate to appoint one person focusing on youth work and another on Children and Families or to have at least two people looking at both areas.
- p) Projections of finance suggest that we might be able to afford one and a half whole time equivalents, although if it was appropriate to appoint part time workers then this could be three individuals. It is important that we appoint people who are well qualified and have some experience as we cannot provide the supervision and guidance to less self sufficient employees.
- q) Working with third age is another area where there could be useful support. By the nature of our villages there are a significant number of newly retired people who may want or welcome contact with the church. It is suggested that we consider employing someone with the remit of developing those links. This is not a role that is as well recognised or developed as Youth or Children and Families. The circuit will need to explore this option carefully before making any commitment. The possibility of a half time appointment has been put into the financial projections.

- r) The financial situation of our churches varies. Thurlstone and Millhouse Green are conscious of the responsibility that the large legacy they received puts upon them. They want to use the money well. Using some of it to support these projects is an option they are prepared to consider.
- s) On the other hand there are a few churches who are struggling to meet their share commitment and it would be supportive of the circuit to reduce some of this burden.
- t) One way we can release ministerial time for mission, contact and support with the churches is to provide help with the administrative tasks that the church requires of them. We could therefore employ a part time worker to help in this way.
- u) As we plan for the period beyond five years it becomes more and more difficult to predict our income and expenditure. However, if we do nothing it seems likely that churches will just close and then their resources will be taken up elsewhere.
- v) If we employ lay workers the church will require us to have a support group for them.
- w) The lay workers will not be used effectively and efficiently if they are trying to do a little in lots of churches. It will be necessary to decide where they concentrate their activity.
- x) In addition the outcome of this review needs to be kept in view and guided forward. The Circuit Leadership Team is probably the best group to do this.

Recommendations

1. The circuit should charge the Circuit Leadership Team with the implementation of the recommendations and the oversight and review of the ongoing developments.
2. The circuit should no longer have ten services on a Sunday morning all at the same time. This should be achieved either by pairing the timing of services to, for example 9.30am and 11.00am or by merging services into one location.
3. The circuit should develop, learn and use more appealing hymnody and 'Singing the Faith' should become the standard hymn book used in the circuit, except where LEP arrangements dictate otherwise.
4. The circuit should adopt a budget policy over a ten year period which will utilise the surplus income from renting the unoccupied manses, the money in reserve from the sale of Ingbirchworth and money made generously available from the reserves of Thurlstone and Millhouse Green.
5. The circuit should seek to employ administrative support for the ministers for 10 hours a week.
6. The circuit should seek to employ a half time worker whose role would be to develop a deeper understanding of the Christian Gospel with people in the "third age", that is to say the relatively young and active retired group, with whom the churches have contact.
7. The circuit should employ at least two workers equivalent to one and half whole time equivalents to work with Children and Families and also Youth work.
8. The circuit will need to appoint a support group for the lay workers.
9. The circuit should make available funds to each church up to £2,500 to cover 50% of the costs of obtaining internet access for the premises and modern IT equipment.
10. The circuit should continue to give financial support to the Denby Dale Centre at the same level as previously granted, and should support similar applications to the District.
11. The circuit should help those churches which are struggling financially by reducing the number of shares to a level which gives a more sustainable platform for contributions. Local churches should then encourage new giving annually to maintain this as the circuit moves forward.
12. Churches should consider what the review of their own church life has highlighted and what needs changing in their own church. Churches should be invited to come forward with three recommendations for themselves. In addition they should suggest how they might use the resources that have been proposed in this report.
13. Both churches and the circuit need to find ongoing ways of embedding the values and ethos of this report in their structures. We therefore recommend that the circuit

should appoint a small group to organise events and training sessions to enable churches to examine their church culture and activity with a view to changing. This will include examining alternative forms of worship, working as a church in small groups, and making contacts with schools.