

PLYMOUTH & EXETER METHODIST DISTRICT AUTUMN SYNOD 2017

STATISTICS FOR MISSION

FEEDBACK FROM CIRCUITS*

[a note from the Synod Secretary. I am very happy to correct/amplify any of the points made and reissue an amended record.]*

The District Chair, Graham Thompson, asked Circuit Groups to anchor the Conference 2017 discussion of the Connexional Statistics for Mission in their local experience. To do this he provided District and Circuit Statistics for Mission which detailed the trends identified in the Connexional statistics at a local level. Each District was asked to share one reflection with Synod.

No Circuit was surprised by the information about declining numbers contained in the statistics.

Responses were:

Plymouth & Devonport

Our concerns are a spiritual problem which needs a spiritual solution. We must train people to share and empower people to share.

Plymouth Mission

Are we concentrating too much on organisational information? Our focus needs to be helping and equipping Christians for everyday living and growing disciples. Our priority should be those who have no faith at all.

Torbay

We are encouraged by the depth of faith in our Circuit. We have buildings in the right places. We need to get our act together; push up and stir-up and change. We must pray going into our work and train and support our members.

South Petherton & Crewkerne

We need to build confidence in sharing the faith and consider employing a lay worker to work with older members.

South Devon

Decline is not the whole picture. We see potential and hope in our experience that God is with us. We are well regarded by our community. We need to improve our capacity for conversation with folk about who and what we are.

Teignbridge

We must continue to nurture and develop relationships beyond our own community. We are not good at translating these connections into discipleship. We are not good at seeing and respecting faith in others.

Tavistock

Methodism is a movement for mission and we have all the necessary elements; small groups; born in song, etc. We need greater confidence in sharing testimonies. We observe that those joining us are not interested in denominational branding; they do not see themselves with a denominational label; more of a *Spring Harvest* approach. There is a need to rediscover our denominational identity.

Exeter, Coast & Country

Crisis creates opportunity.

We need to be where people are at and have a full picture of those we have a connection with. We are not imparting but sharing. "We need to shut up!... and listen". We should be sacrificial; this is not about preserving Methodism. We will need to give things up to create anew.

Bude & Holsworthy

Our statistics look quite good, but do we believe it? Our strength is that we will not die but it is also our weakness. Evangelism driven by a need for numbers is not evangelism, neither is the expectation that God will listen to us. Statistics only worry people. We are the people who can share Christ.

West Devon

The membership are the people who are funding the wide activity of the church. As membership declines it impacts on our capacity to sustain activity and maintain a presence in smaller communities. Pastoral care and pastoring is a high priority and need. There is a need to develop flexible patterns of ministry and to communicate well.

Tiverton & Wellington

Are we debating the future of institutions or the needs of people? We have the capacity to tell a different story about ourselves rather than make ourselves miserable. Our investment in relationship building - both inside and beyond the church community - is powerful.

Ringsash

We need to keep on keeping on... preaching the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sangster said some time ago that every congregation is only one or two generations from extinction. We continue, even if we use the figures for our discomfort.

Taunton Deane & South Sedgemoor

We are aware that we are the enabler of many valuable community activities. How do we engage with this footfall? How do we give the space and authority to exercise leadership in ways we have yet to identify?

Torrige

We are not surprised but some folk in the pews might be. Folk [adherents] are loyal to their chapel and congregation. We cannot expect anyone to come to worship someone they don't know, so we need to find ways to introduce Him. We need more engagement with the community and to make our thanks to God known. We should join together as much as we can. We need a new Pentecost.

West Somerset

Statistics are not the whole story. There are pockets of growth and engagement. Our attendance is higher than our membership. We need to develop and maintain our connections and be open to adjustment to cultural change. To do this we need to be an 'intentional' community, looking ahead, seeking community partnerships, looking for ways to be church that closes the gap between church and community. We are considering the appointment of 1 or 2 lay workers.

Ifracombe & Barnstaple

The statistics don't reflect the Circuit. Two Local Ecumenical Partnerships are growing but this does not show up. Churches working together leads to growth. The Service of Celebration of the society at Bishops Tawton, following closure, led to a full chapel of people from across the Circuit, with a sense of continuing community. We could do worse than adopt the motto seen on a Maintenance Business Van 'React, Maintain and Build.'

The District Chair urged us to take forward these points and the wider agenda in our local situations. The issue is in our hands. We already have 7,000 members - there are more to come.