



# The Methodist Church in Sheffield

... growing followers of Jesus

## COMMUNITY COHESION IN THE SHEFFIELD CIRCUIT – DECEMBER 2016 CIRCUIT MEETING

### Introduction

At the June 2016 Circuit meeting, information was given about a new cohesion framework being developed for Sheffield. This paper, prepared by the Justice and Peace Mission Action Group (MAG) explains why this is relevant to our mission and invites conversation at the meeting before formally requesting that the statement be adopted as policy for the Circuit

### What is Community Cohesion?

Part of our calling as God's people called Methodists in the circuit is to be practical examples of the upside-down reality of God's Kingdom in our world and to celebrate the presence of God-with-us in our communities. This is because - as we were recently reminded in a lectionary Epistle reading - 'He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Colossians 1: 17)

Our circuit policy is now based on our agreed statement 'Living out God's Mission in Sheffield' which invites us *inter alia* to be a people who are:

- Being good neighbours to people in need and challenging injustice, and
- Working together on issues of concern in public life

Christians have long been seen as bridge-builders, or the glue that holds communities together – we might reflect on images of salt and light, yeast, table hosts and many more besides. As Methodists, we rightly seek to reflect social holiness – to bring both Gospel truths and compassionate support to those with whom we share community life.

The Cohesion Strategy for Sheffield is being drawn up by a group that is independent of any particular institution – steered by the voluntary sector, the Cohesion Advisory Group is drawn from faith, education, academic, voluntary, community and statutory sectors. The Methodist Church is represented by Dr Anne Hollows and Rev Phill Borkett. The group has developed a framework which is offered to organisations throughout Sheffield (and wherever those who are Sheffield-based work in areas that are within different local authority districts). The intention is to invite organisations to adopt the statement and use this as a tool to encourage greater cohesion across their activities. The notion of a 'Cohesion lens' is used – i.e. looking at everything that is done through the lens of the statement to ask whether more could be done to include the community in which activities are being carried out.

### What does cohesion look like in practice?

We recognise that a discussion about cohesion can easily become abstract! For that reason, the Peace and Justice MAG have been collecting examples of ways in which our churches are already working to build community – See appendix. We hope you will look through these and be encouraged to think of further examples from your own church and community experience. It is important to remember that challenging injustice and promoting cohesion will often involve challenging assumptions in both the community and in our churches. If the gospel should disturb, then the church should disrupt the negative stereotypes so often featured in the media.

Central to 'doing' cohesion is understanding the way we do cohesion. So as Rachel Lampard said in her vice-president's address to Conference, it is not about fixing people or situations. Rather it is about spending time with people and listening to what they want, how they want it to happen and working with them to achieve it. A project that works well in one area will not have the same outcome in another area. So an important first step is to have a really clear knowledge of the issues and needs in our communities.

Sometimes developing cohesive communities will be small activities needing little or no funding while at other times, small ventures will grow into complex projects, like the Terminus Project, harnessing local authority and health grants. The appendix illustrates how cohesion can be enhanced in rural, suburban and inner city communities

### ***Cohesion Statement of Purpose for Sheffield Circuit***

*We, the people of the Sheffield Methodist Circuit, will continue to work towards making our communities places where everyone is made to feel welcome and valued, in a community where everyone is treated with dignity and respect regardless of age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, language, belief, religion, or financial wealth; and that these values shall apply equally within the family unit, community and places of learning and work, recreation or worship. Cohesion means people living and working in harmony with respect for each other. This requires building good relationships with neighbours and across the city. We recognise that good relations require a commitment to equality and justice. We regard economic opportunity and well-being as essential conditions for cohesion.*

### ***Working towards cohesion involves:***

- *Building relationships where power is shared on a basis of co-operation and collaboration*
- *Seeing each other as neighbours, recognising similarities and hearing each other's stories*
- *Doing what we can to reduce barriers, particularly related to educational, economic and other inequalities*
- *Encouraging integration alongside addressing issues of differences in development between communities*
- *Recognising that community tensions are natural – that all voices need to be heard.*
- *Supporting skills development that enables people to work through differences and express their needs through open and honest discussions.*

### **Following conversation, the Circuit Meeting agreed to:**

1. Adopt the Cohesion Statement of Purpose for Sheffield Circuit.
2. Commend the Statement for discussion on agendas of all church councils by Spring 2017.
3. Encourage church councils, as reviews are carried out, to consider how their activities might be undertaken to give maximum attention to issues of cohesion as outlined in the statement.
4. To request the Justice and Peace MAG to review the implementation of this statement and report on progress to the December 2017 Circuit Meeting.

## APPENDIX

### Examples of Cohesion in our Church communities November 2016

- An ecumenical group, representing 6 Christian congregations in Dronfield, does chaplaincy in a local factory. The interaction there has generated good will between the town and the business, fostered inter-faith and inter-cultural conversations over cups of coffee, connected foreign employees with area groups and congregations, and has instigated friendships between people of different backgrounds.
- A group of Iranian young men who attend Highfield Trinity and Victoria Stafford Road Churches meet fortnightly to explore the Christian faith alongside established members of the churches. They share conversation, food, faith and stories together.
- At Renishaw, the Café, has brought people into a church which had been given a red traffic light rating for possible closure in the circuit review.
- The annual Millhouses Church Christmas Tree Festival draws in many local traders, schools and organisations which use the premises during the week.
- Banner Cross set up Little Fish Mother and Toddler group, to meet an identified need in the area.
- Highfield Trinity have two groups that reach out the diverse local population of families mainly from South Asia and Eastern Europe – A Family After School Drop in and a Mother and Toddler group. Church members support workers by engaging with families and preparing refreshments
- Community based activity at Trinity Woodhouse and Handsworth Churches is based on the values of welcome regardless of colour, background, etc. While the coffee mornings and lunch clubs we offer aren't labelled as 'Cohesion work', we have seen people from different economic backgrounds and ages come together in both churches. Through Siggy in her UNLOCK role, some work has been done and continues to be done around 'hospitality, racism, social exclusion and the fears people express around the topic of immigration'. This is seen as part of a work that enables better cohesion within Sheffield.
- The Ecumenical Manor Church and Community Project (MCCP) based at William Temple aims to bring the local community together by responding to the different needs of the elderly, young families and especially those trapped in cycles of poverty and deprivation. Working with other agencies across the Manor, we can champion cohesion in different ways.
- Bread4Life – A Community Cohesion Project. Totley Rise began this project in October 2015, with the purpose of developing relationships with a somewhat isolated community in West View Flats Totley. The focus is making bread and soup, every week, then having lunch together, sharing life experiences. Residents take bread home and make extra to give away. The standard is high. Confidence and expertise have grown; lives have become richer. Numbers vary, some attending every week, others dipping in and out. Guinness Housing association and the City Council support the Project, providing a small bedsit and with small grants respectively.
- Having met several people who like to play chess, one member at Dronfield St. Paul's organised a weekly chess club. A small group of church and non-church people now gathers weekly, creating a link to the dance group which meets in the building at the same time, and instigating friendships which now exist outside the weekly meeting.

- Seeing the need for older people to have time of social and mental stimulation, one member at Coal Aston organised a Games and Pastimes group. Over puzzles, Scrabble, Rummikub and coffee, church and neighbourhood people are meeting, and a group of adults with special needs now joins the group regularly.
- Responding to a Circuit Review challenge to engage with the community, one member at Apperknowle set out to organise the Derbyshire village's first-ever well-dressing. With much planning and hard work, the activity brought together village residents, church members, artists, veterans of other well-dressings, musicians, and members of the Lost Chord charity.
- Firth Park Family Worship Centre -A longstanding congregation drawn from a number of African nations which is well integrated into the life and witness of Firth Park Methodist Church. A community of welcome and awareness of the need to both bring new insights and yet adapt to living in a new culture. Their strength lies in this ability to hold the tension of celebrating their varied African cultures and integrating into a British context.
- Firth Park Centre For Life - In an ever-changing environment the maintenance of premises suitable for community groups from a nursery- to ESL courses – college links – job opportunity days – just some of the community groups that are enabled to come together for the benefit of the surrounding community.
- The Interfaith centre at St Andrew's Psalter Lane brings together members of different faiths on a regular basis to talk and learn from each other, always sharing food.
- The Terminus Initiative is a community outreach, birthed from a vision shared by a group of churches serving the Lowedges area in Sheffield 8 (Greenhill Methodist Church was one). A community café and charity shop has been running since April 2002, and serves as a welcoming, safe place for customers and volunteer staff alike. A variety of projects has been developed since then to meet the needs of this and nearby communities which suffer deprivation. The Women's Conversation Club welcomes new arrivals and gives them a support network and help with improving English. As a result of being part of the Terminus Initiative women have also been encouraged to attend other groups run by local organisations, helping refugees and immigrants socialise and integrate with the rest of the population and access other types of support, e.g. second hand school uniforms, child safety equipment for the home, a community allotment. The Healthy Living Centre is a hub for health improvement activities across the area, delivered under a contract with Sheffield City Council. They all aim to reduce isolation, improve mental wellbeing through connecting people to the wider community, and help people take control over their lives.

A Public Health Specialist has commented:

*'The impact on the local community has been significant. The Terminus embodies a community service provided by the community and for the community. It is recognised, spoken about, trusted, and referred to in various fora across the patch; its name is synonymous with a warm welcome and an always welcoming, regularly challenging environment. It is a place where people enjoy having their say, and learning about the views and perspectives of others. Above all the Terminus is known as a safe and tolerant environment – a sanctuary for people who visit whatever their reasons for that visit may be. Most importantly, the Terminus is regarded as somewhere to pass the time of day with another human being, experience a different four walls, and achieve a sense of 'belonging'. Its longer term impact on this community is immeasurable.'*