



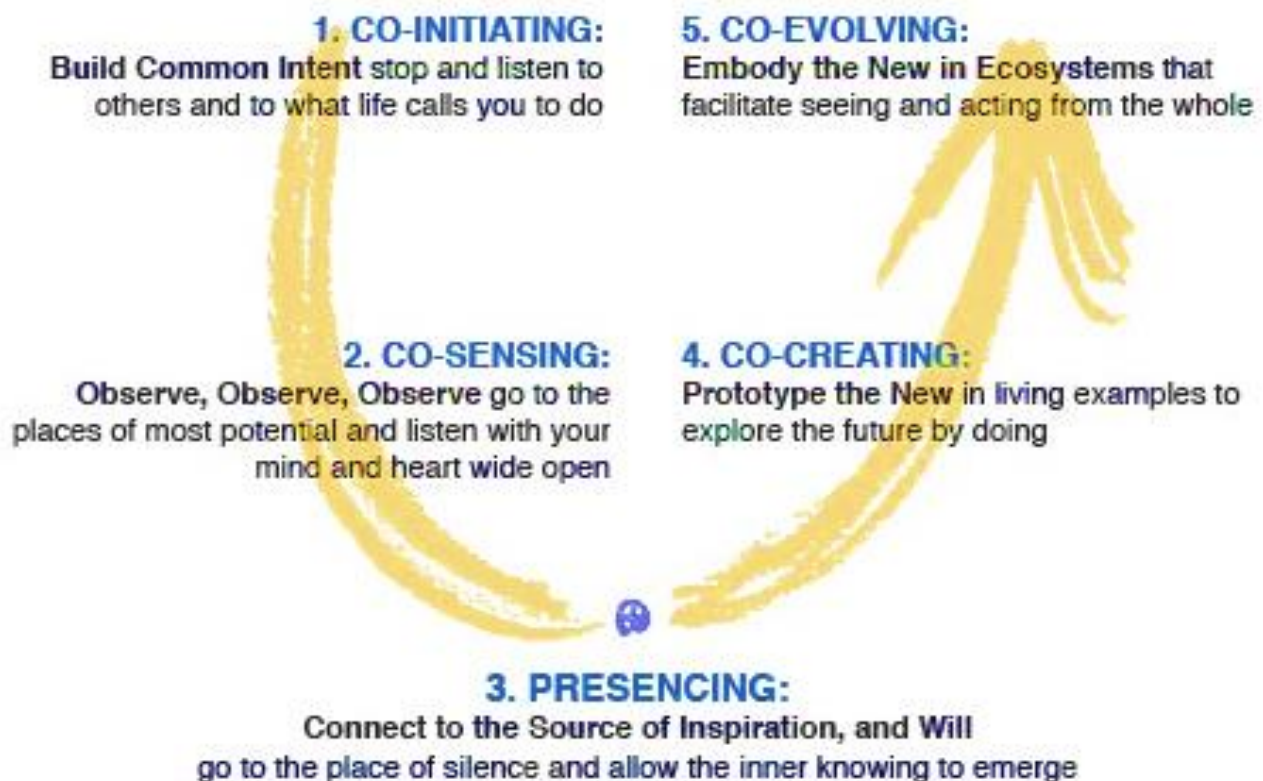
The Methodist Church in Sheffield

Casting the net on the other side

Update for June 2024 Circuit Meeting

Thank you one again to all church councils and individuals who have provided feedback on *casting the net on the other side* since the March Circuit Meeting. Not every word written has a direct answer on these pages, but all were read and have played a part in shaping these next thoughts. We appreciate that responding takes up some of your time, but hearing different perspectives is essential to the circuit we must be together.

We continue our work to *cast nets on the other side* using “Theory U” thinking.

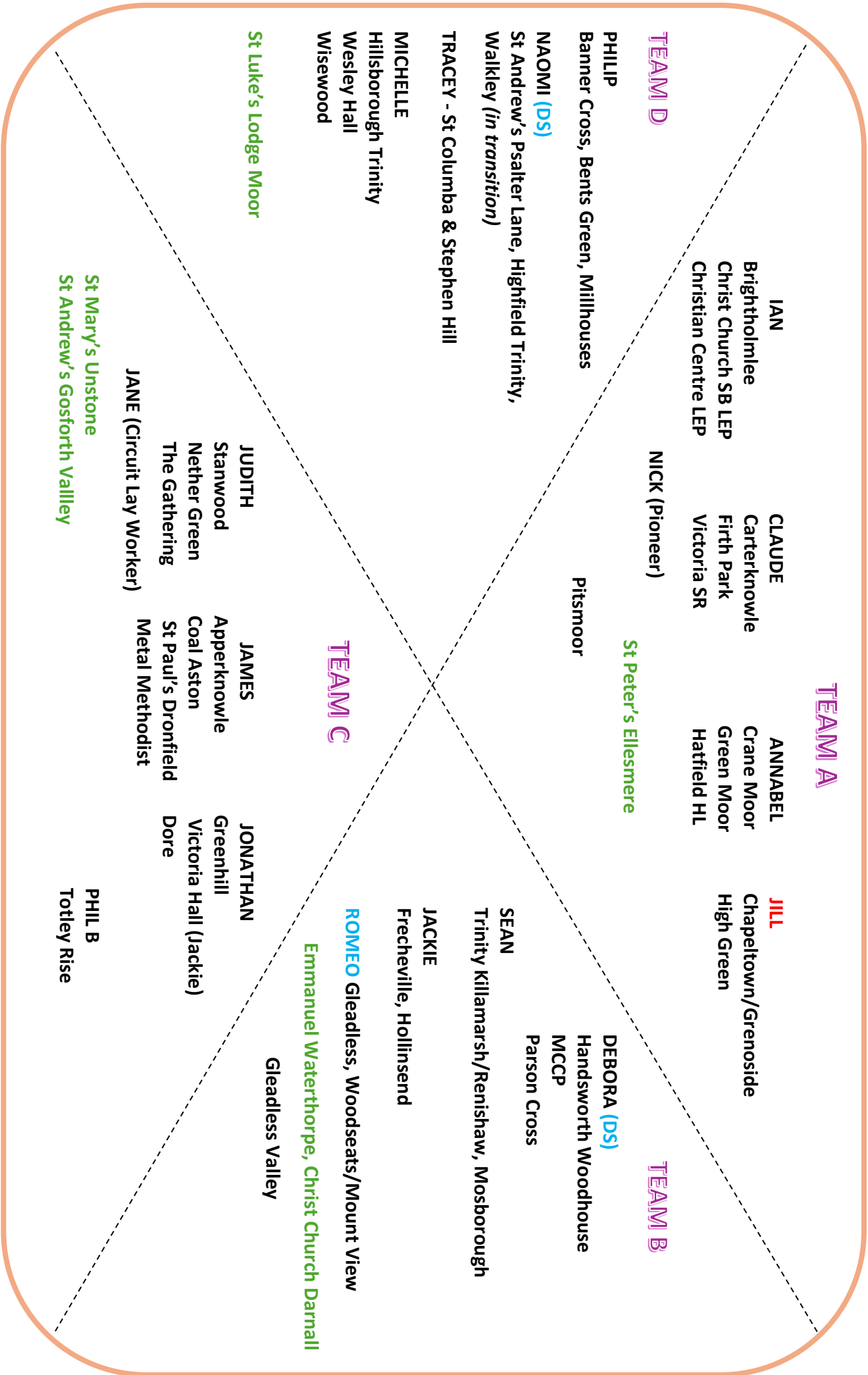


Part A – Restoring connections and relationships

“The circuit is too big, and we have lost our connection to and relationship with each other”

LOCAL TEAMS (co-creating)

We have explored the shape of Local Teams in more detail. Because their **first purpose** is to provide a forum for deep supportive local colleagueship for ordained circuit ministers and lay employees, we have reduced from five to four teams so that no ministers will be isolated (without colleagues). From September 2024 teams will be as follows. Teams will have soft borders, which may change over time.



Note this diagram does not include lay workers employed by churches or employees with circuit-wide remits.

Ministers will start meeting in their teams over the summer. Each team will find its own way of working, responding to how local mission and ministry feels. In the autumn your minister will talk with you about other things that might be helpful to do as a team in your context.

Circuit Stewards are revisiting which church councils they meet with, so that this better matches to the Local Teams.

As stated previously, please don't feel that existence of these Local Teams should do anything to prevent you from investing in relationships with any other people, churches or organisations that are helpful in your context.

CONNECTING LAY EMPLOYEES

Strengthening supportive networks for lay employees is also important. We will organise gatherings encompassing between then all circuit and church lay employees in the autumn. Attending these should be considered part of – not in addition to – contracted working hours.

KNOWLEDGE HUB

We often struggle to know who else in the circuit might have similar experiences that we can learn from (e.g. where are the other lunch clubs, outdoor churches, Messy Churches etc). We will create a "knowledge hub" to help churches easily access advice and mutual support.

This of course is a task that will never be finished, but one we must start in earnest.

Part B – Lifting burdens

"We can't focus on the central call to work out our discipleship and to participate in the mission of Christ, because we are burdened by the administrative demands needed to maintain our buildings and our societies"

LIVING TOGETHER IN FEARFUL TIMES

Are alert from feedback following the March Circuit Meeting that these are challenging times. And also that some congregations are holding bold but sensitive conversations about whether they should cease to meet. We ask all members of the Circuit Meeting to hold those congregations in prayer.

Different people respond to challenge in different ways:

- Some have visions and willingness to take risks, but moving forward is difficult – we need to give people agency to act
- Some are tempted by despondency about whether they are noticed or whether change is possible – we need to be open and transparent
- Some are weary and seek clarity or simplicity of what is asked of them – we need to be clear that permission to lay down without judgement is real, and to listen and share stories diligently through this season of upheaval

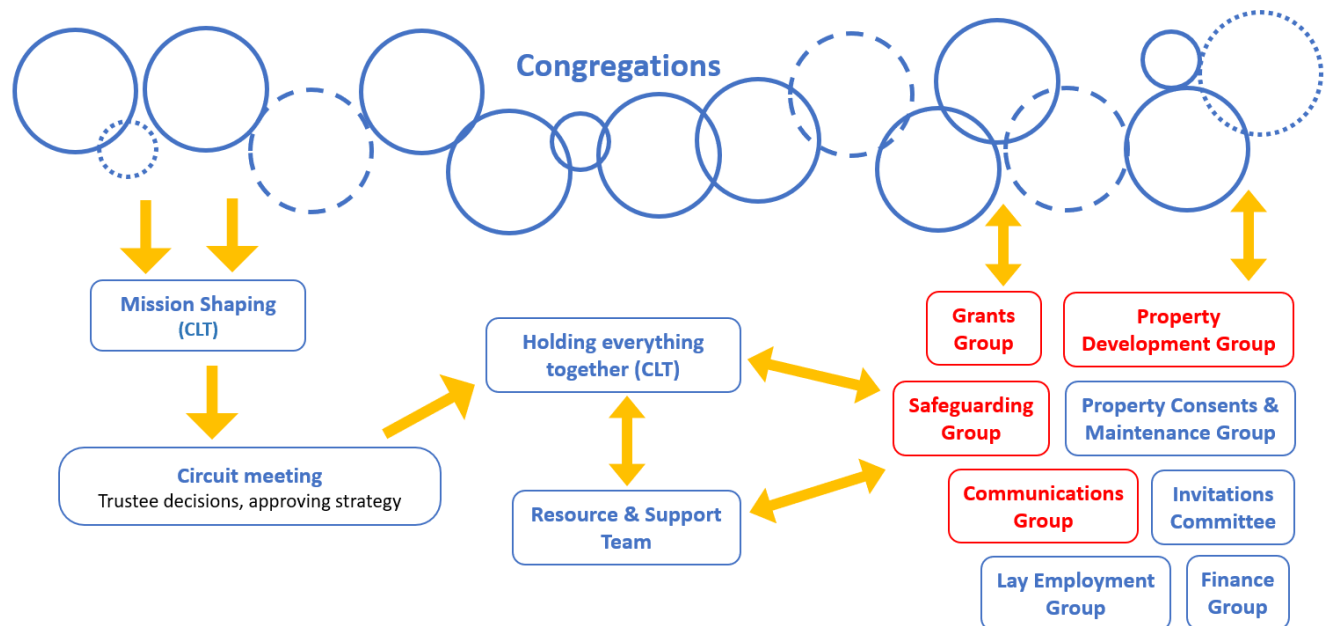
We expect the changes to circuit governance described below will bring some visible lessening of administrative burdens, but do not yet have any planned major changes to discuss.

Part C - Responding to the call

“We long to be set free to have space to respond to the call of the Spirit, so that, through ministry and mission, we might fulfil the unique thing to which we have been called at this time and in this place”

MORE RESPONSIVE CIRCUIT GOVERNANCE (presencing)

Some changes will be made to the way the circuit is run to make it more responsive to the missional needs of congregations and new work at this time.



Mission Shaping – the CLT will continue to meet for periodic away days to continue the process of deep listening and proposing next steps to *casting the net on the other side*. People with specific expertise will be invited where relevant to the matters to be discussed. progress and new strategies will be shared with the circuit meeting for its approval.

Holding Everything Together – the Circuit Leadership Team (including all circuit stewards and ministers) will be responsible for day to day decisions and making sure we implement what we have decided to do. We discussed whether this group was too big, but with so much being in a state of change, including all voices felt more important.

To further improve transparency, very brief notes from CLT meetings will be circulated to congregations.

Small groups will be responsible for most of the enabling work of the circuit:

- **Grants Group (new)** will recommend grants for approval in response to requests from congregations. It will be given a fixed budget to manage, so the Finance Group will no longer need to be a second reviewer of grant applications
- **Property Development Group (new)** will assess properties in circuit trusteeship for missional value, community value and financial value. It will oversee creative repurposing, sale and purchase of properties.
- **Property Consents & Maintenance Group** will oversee the maintenance of manses and circuit approvals of church consents system projects.

- **Safeguarding Group (new)** will work with the Circuit Administrator supporting Communications & Safeguarding to embed excellent safeguarding culture and support church safeguarding officers across the circuit.
- **Communications Group (new)** will work with the Circuit Administrator supporting Communications & Safeguarding to improve story and vision sharing and practical communications across the circuit.
- **Invitations Committee** will make recommendations about reinventions and new profiles/ invitations for ministers. We anticipate that these will increasingly align to the Local Teams, both relating to existing and potential new congregations.
- **Lay Employment Group** will ensure that appropriate HR support is in place for circuit and church roles.
- **Finance Group** will oversee circuit finances including performance against the agreed budget

As practices become established, these groups will increasingly provide CLT with reports and recommendations, freeing up CLT agenda for implementing new strategies and empowering the groups.

The **Resource & Support** staff team will provide necessary support to all of these groups and teams and liaise with congregations.

NEW WORK AND POTENTIALLY FRUITFUL BUT FRAGILE WORK (co-sensing)

At its recent Mission Shaping away day, CLT spent time exploring case studies of possible new forms of church and fragile but potentially fruitful existing missional work. We used these to explore what they would need in order to flourish, and what this might mean for our circuit. Here are the key themes from these discussions, to prepare for discussion together at our Circuit Meeting.

These are not a proposal with action points, timelines and structures. Instead they are the next step into renewed hearts and minds.

NURTURING INNOVATION

“...cast your net on the other side”

The time has come to be bold in trying new things.

This does not necessarily always mean taking big risks, we can try lots of little experiments (think of the parable of the sower). We need to give each other permission to learn from things which don't turn out as we had hoped, rather than calling these failures.

We should expect and celebrate difference – why should all of our expressions of church look similar.

What is the riskiest venture you have ever been part of? How did you go about this? What did you learn from it?

REFRAMING MISSION

Do we make fish, or do we discover the wonders of the deep?

If we act as if we need to bring our God to the people around us, we will be limited by our own resources and prior knowledge. What would happen if our plans and activities were shaped by believing more that God is already present and active in every street around us, and our role is to first listen and then to join in with what God is doing?

How much energy do we spend doing things “for” or “to” people, rather than the ultimately more empowering exercise of spending time being with them.

Where do you notice God present and active in your neighbourhood, but beyond “church”? What would it mean to “join in” with this?

FISHING TOGETHER

“I’m going out to fish” “We’re going with you”

The origin stories of almost all congregations include people who were already part of another congregation, but were released to play their part in starting something new. This potential still exists across our circuit. If we could enable more people to give some of their time to support fruitful but fragile or new mission (without necessarily losing the support of their current fellowship) we would see more growth. This could be places close to where our members live, or in parts of the city where we are under-represented.

For the sending/resourcing church it would also bring benefits of cross-fertilising new ideas and experiences.

What would it take for this to be possible? Allowing some things to stop? Clearer communications?

Who stepped beyond their home church to start the church where you worship? What could your congregation do to help some of its members support fragile or new mission elsewhere?

RECOGNISING GIFTS

“Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn’t recognise him”

In difficult times it is hard to lift our eyes from what feels scarce to remember God’s abundant generosity. Between us we have considerable resources and skills.

- We hope that changes to circuit structure will make it easier to provide whatever external support is needed to respond to local missional opportunities.
- The Circuit Knowledge Hub should also make it easier to access relevant expertise.
- We need to become less shy about money – doing new mission will require us to be creative in using our assets to generate income

Do you carry a vision you cannot fulfil by yourself? What holds you back?

RESOLUTIONS

18/1 The Circuit Meeting receives the report

18/2 The Circuit Meeting agrees to the formation of ‘Local Teams’ as set out in the report.

18/2 The Circuit Meeting agrees to the changes in Circuit Governance as set out in the report, and directs the CLT to undertake further work on the constitution of these groups, and to bring proposals to a future Circuit Meeting in order for the new structure to be implemented during the connexional year 2024/25.