

# Nene Valley 2017

## A Circuit Consultation

Earls Barton : Great Park Street : Hope : Irchester : Irthlingborough : Kingsway : Old Weston : Raunds : Ringstead : Risley : Thrapston : Wollaston : Yelden

When faced by a new challenge what do we do? We can refer to what has happened in that place in previous generations or to experience gained in other locations that might prove helpful or we can cast our minds around current thinking that has not necessarily been part of either. We are faced, in the Circuit, not with a brand new challenge but by a development that has been part of our experience over recent years - how do we cope with the pressures of falling numbers, smaller income and a continually escalating budget?

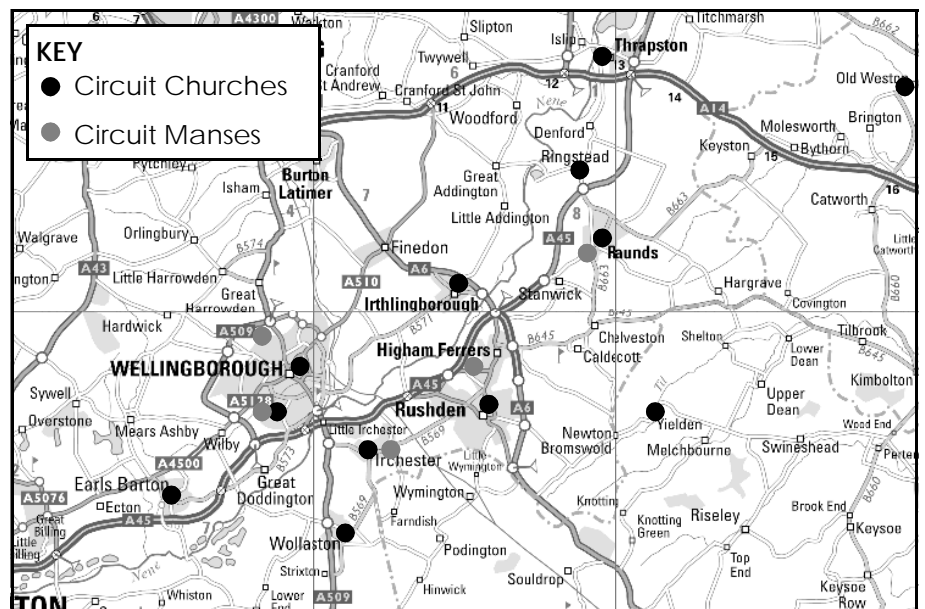
We begin by asking not how do we save money but what is it we are trying to do? We, in our churches, follow our usual pattern of services and specials, care, outreach and innovation, we engage in the circuit with training for service, teaching and evangelism, but is there an overall vision? Are there values we share as a Christian community?

Some thinking suggests that the values we may look at include:

- individual personal responsibility for the ministry of the church - we all play our part
- continuing growth in our discipleship - we seek to follow Christ
- living as a distinctive Christian community - we love one another
- intentionally invite - we share our faith
- encountering God through everything - we recognise God is every aspect of life

### NENE VALLEY TODAY

- 629 Members
- 450 worshipping on a Sunday
- 21 Worship Leaders
- 18 Local Preachers
- 13 Preaching Places
- 11 Methodist Churches
- 5 Manses
- 4 Ministers
- 3 Local Preachers On Trial
- 3 Supernumerary Ministers
- 2 Lay Workers
- 1 Administrator
- 1 Methodist Home
- 1 Prison
- 1 Youth Worker



### CONSULTATION PROCESS ... DEVELOPING OUR CIRCUIT LIFE TOGETHER

Following the Circuit Consultation in October 2007, this document has been prepared by the Circuit Leadership Team to encourage you to have your say. We hope that each church and individual will take the time to pray, reflect and respond on its contents so we can continue on our journey together, led by God. Many thanks.

Please send your responses to Jennie Clark, Circuit Administrator:

☒ Hope Methodist Church, Park Road, Rushden NN10 0RW

☒ [nenevalleycircuit@nenevalleycircuit.plus.com](mailto:nenevalleycircuit@nenevalleycircuit.plus.com)

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# Why?, What? How? A Gospel & a Methodist approach

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At the beginning of April 1739 John Wesley "submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed *in the highways* the glad tidings of salvation." Only a few days earlier he has seen George Whitfield "preaching in the fields" and found it **very** difficult to accept. There is no doubt that this change marked the beginning of Methodism.

In the years following, it was not only that he preached the gospel out of doors but **to whom** he preached it. In 1742 he was in Newcastle and "walked down to ... the poorest part of the town". This kind of decision about where to preach gave rise to a famous saying of John Wesley, "Go not to those who need you but to those who need you most".

How is this relevant for our mission today? We know that we are faced with falling numbers, smaller income, properties that need major redevelopment/repair, an increasing budget, a shortage of ministers. We cannot ignore these factors, but they must not dominate our vision of the Kingdom of God.

We also know that the Methodist Church no longer exists in many places and struggles to survive in some others, but this document raises the vision of developing new church communities. This might be doing something new in an area of new housing or finding a different way to be the Church in some places where we already have churches or people. It may make us feel more than a bit anxious as John Wesley felt in 1739, but it could be a change that marks a new beginning.

If this is to happen, it will need a three-fold commitment from us all.

1. Like John Wesley we will have to move into unfamiliar territory. In Church we are the powerful people. In our churches we know what happens, what to do; others do not. We may not feel powerful, but in our churches we are 'at home' and that makes us seem powerful to the 'outsider' ... but can we really evangelise if we see others as outsiders? Paul went to the Corinthian Christians 'in weakness' (1 Corinthians 2:3). Can we present the gospel to people and invite them to follow Jesus unless we see ourselves as 'one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread?' (Luther)
2. To evangelise is making someone aware of the value that they have in God's eyes, not to make them feel inadequate because they haven't got what we have got. Our model is not Wesley or Luther or Paul but Christ. God in Christ became what we are, that we might become what he is. 2 Corinthians 8:9 reads, 'the Lord Jesus was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich'. We have to be where they are, not bring them to where we are. It could be as much a revolution for us as it was for John Wesley.<sup>1</sup>
3. We will also have to pick up where we left off in the year of "Pray Without Ceasing". Did that year change your prayer life in any way? If not, do you want it to? Personally and together we will need to ask God for the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 18:19; Luke 11:9-10).

Risk for the gospel's sake needs prayer and prayer is risky too. Whatever else is being asked of us, these two things must be there.

Rev Michael Jackson

## Note

1. Look also at 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 to see how Paul put this into practice

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## Reflections on consultation so far ...

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In this consultation process we have been reflecting on how the Nene Valley Circuit might look in 2017 - that is ten years time. It's quite difficult to project your thinking forward by ten years, particularly as there are many uncertainties, but we can identify trends in the church and the local community that we need to take seriously, eg. increasing population. Once we have a clearer picture of 2017 we can begin to explore how we get there.

We began by exploring what being a 'Circuit' meant for us today. Three themes emerged:

- **sharing:** enabling the sharing of gifts, skills and knowledge with a wider group of people and churches
- **administration:** a great deal of administration is demanded by other agencies - doing this centrally makes good use of our resources
- **us:** we are all members of the circuit - it provides an extra dimension to our life and work as individual churches

The experience of being a part of a Circuit was not always felt to be positive and some of the challenges identified included:

- a lack of sense of unity across the circuit
- the financial cost; sometimes in conflict with resources for local initiatives
- tension between the circuit and the local situation, eg. ecumenical links, local need

This picture of 'Circuit' provided a context for our exploration of the future. We had wide ranging discussions and from those a number of themes appeared.

We are very reliant on our ministers, not only for their leadership but also because of what they do, as individuals, on behalf of the church. The Methodist Church is seeing a declining number of ministers (estimated reduction from 2,500 in 2002 to 2,000 in 2010) and this will impact on the life of all churches and circuits. We need to be realistic about the number of ministers we will have in 2017 and this will not be at the level we see today.

In the circuit we have a number of lay people in ministry roles, ie. Circuit Administrator, Lay Workers in Irthlingborough and Wollaston and a Youth Worker in Wellingborough. This is seen as a pattern of ministry that will need to be extended, taking on some of the responsibilities currently undertaken by the ministers as well as

some more specialist roles, eg. finance.

There was a lot of discussion about buildings and the cost of their maintenance, both financial and personnel. However, it was seen as important that buildings do not dominate our thinking and that our mission is the priority. This is not only our mission to the local community but the circuit as a whole, bearing in mind that the nature of community is changing. We are not only being a part a geographical community but also a network built on relationships - we see this as many people do not attend their local church but the one where they feel most 'at home.'

Only when we have a clearer picture of our mission can we begin to explore how our buildings support or hinder this mission. Most of our capital is tied up in property and it may be that we need to release some of this for ministry to support and enhance this mission.

There are many places where the Methodist Church no longer has a presence and we need to explore how we can reverse this trend. This is not necessarily about returning to some of these places but could be about church communities developing elsewhere. These might be places where people are already part of another Sunday congregation but come together at other times to witness to their local community.

It is clear that the Methodist Church in the Nene Valley in 2017 will look very different from today. Change is inevitable as we search to develop a mission focussed and sustainable circuit. It will inevitably challenge some of what we see as the norm today, but this is essential if we are to take risks and embrace the challenges of the future.

Paul Taylor  
October 2007

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# What do you think?

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We hope that you will feel able to be a part of this process and we look forward to your reflections and responses, either as an individual, a group or a church. Below you will see the vision of the Circuit Leadership Team which we hope you will take some time to consider and pray about. You may feel you want to endorse, add to, amend or challenge our thinking, and we would welcome and encourage this.

Please send your reflections and responses, in writing, to Jennie Clarke, Circuit Administrator, **by 29th February 2008**

☒ Hope Methodist Church, Park Road, Rushden NN10 0RW  
☒ [nenevalleycirct@nenevalleycirct.plus.com](mailto:nenevalleycirct@nenevalleycirct.plus.com)

## Consultation timetable

**Saturday 6th October 2007**

Circuit Consultation

**Thursday 15th November 2007**

Presentation to Circuit Meeting

**November 2007 to February 2008**

Local Consultation

**Thursday 6th March 2008**

Conversations at Circuit Meeting

**Thursday 19th June 2008**

Proposals from Circuit Leadership Team to Circuit Meeting

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## Our Mission ...

... to serve God in the Nene Valley

We live out our mission through our caring, evangelism, learning, service and worship

## Our Vision ...

... as the Nene Valley Circuit is to enable, support and challenge:

- everyone praying: privately, in groups and in Sunday worship
- everyone belonging to a small group: for nurture and support in discipleship; mutual care; reading the Bible together
- everyone committed to serving God: being equipped for and participating in worship and ministry

## Our Challenge ...

... as churches and individuals is to pray about, reflect on and respond to the following questions:

1. How can we build on what we are already doing our churches to achieve *our vision*?
2. How do we work together to make *our vision* a reality?
3. What can I offer to *our vision* in terms of ... my time? ... my talents? ... my resources?
4. How can we take *our vision* beyond our existing people, buildings or communities?

Please take the time to pray, reflect and talk about this document with others in your church and across the circuit. The timetable, at the top of this page, offers a structure for these conversations and we hope you will ensure that your reflections are heard - it is essential that we hear from everyone. If you require further copies of this document please contact Jennie in the Circuit Office (☎ 01933 316560) or download a copy at [www.nenevalleymethodists.org.uk/vision](http://www.nenevalleymethodists.org.uk/vision)

May God continue to guide and inspire us in our thinking, praying and discussing,

We look forward to hearing from **you**

Circuit Leadership Team