

Reflections upon stationing in city and town centres

As presented by the Revd Martin Turner to the Stationing Committee

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These notes have been written by the Methodist City Centre Network (MCCN) Coordinator, the Rev'd Martin Turner, following a wide consultation exercise with MCCN members.

Martin has followed his notes with a personal reflection from his London context.

1). The Context

The statistics for the growth of urbanisation worldwide are startling, as is made clear in the table below showing the percentage of population in an urban/city environment:-

1800	2%
1900	13%
1950	29%
2008	50% - The tipping point, more than half of the world's population now live in cities!
2030	60% - estimated
2050	85% - estimated

We have thus now reached the "urban millennium," a time when the predominant culture is urban.

Positive characteristics of this urban culture are:-

Diversity, proximity, commercial enterprise, developed transport links both internally and to other urban centres, concentration of the arts, culture, entertainment and higher education.

Difficult characteristics of this urban culture are:-

Alienation, marginalisation, extremes of wealth and poverty, lack of decent housing, infrastructure overload, concentration of those with addiction and mental health issues, racial tension, obesity.

Neutral characteristics of this urban culture are:-

Magnet for those seeking wealthy creating opportunities, politically a major city can dominate either a nation or a region.

Surprisingly work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the 2001 UK census, looking at the largest 27 UK cities, has shown a moving away from the six major UK conurbations and from cities in the North and the West. Less than half of UK cities are now showing growth, with a draining away in particular of the more skilled and wealthy. However in the cities the more affluent groupings have a longer life expectancy, also a lower level of religious adherence.

The exception with regard to religion is London where around 10% are regular church worshippers. London is especially a magnet of younger people, to the expense of all other areas.

2). The Challenges this poses for Methodism.

- The trend towards creating larger Circuits is tending to pull resources away from the city/town centre (C/T). This is often because the C/T churches have a smaller membership and it looks as if there is capacity to take another pastoral role elsewhere.
- A lack of understanding of the huge demands upon city centre ministry in terms of both needy people (the mentally unwell, the homeless, the inadequate, the asylum seeker, the drifting young person, poverty, shelters, food banks etc) and also in terms of relating to the structures and what we might term the “principalities and powers,” (politics, esp. the Mayor and Council, interfaith interaction, industry, commerce, higher education and entertainment.) Many C/T churches have a unique multi-cultural and international dimension.
- The need for the minister to be present at the Church, as against the usual pattern of manse based work. This militates against shared pastoral charge in that on the one hand if the minister is not on site people and issues cannot always be dealt with. On the other hand with multi-charges the other churches in that charge can perceive the minister as always being at the centre.
- The confusion between C/T centre and inner city work. Both are of value but C/T has an enormously wide brief.
- The lack of opportunity for modelling good practice to younger practitioners. This means that very often ministers are appointed with almost no experience or understanding of C/T centre ministry, trying to apply the model from a background of suburban or rural ministry just does not work.
- For ministers living alone C/T stations can be very isolating, as there is no natural community to belong to and the manse may be some distance away from the Church, with no members living nearby.
- Because many travel in to worship on Sundays mid-week involvement, where there may be issues regarding charges for car parking, can be difficult for lay people.
- In a number of stations city centre ministry is being developed based upon a minister operating without a building. This is undoubtedly valuable work but without a building presence becomes hard to establish, and the skills and priorities of the person become so central that when that person moves on the shape of the work tends to change radically. C/T centre missionaries operate best when they have a base and are part of, and answerable to, a C/T team.
- Because of the size of plant and team those with good management skills are sometimes appointed. Good management skills are undoubtedly needed on the team but for the team leader passion, spiritual maturity and gifts of leadership are essential. In one survey entrepreneurial skills were also shown to be very important, as is resilience!
- The face of the C/T centre Church needs to be outwards, this requires a better understanding from both District and Circuit as it means resources are expended without there always being an obvious return.

3). Some possible solutions

- In any survey of Church growth one of the most consistent growth areas are the Cathedrals and the large independent Churches. These are invariably staffed by large teams of both ordained and lay persons. Has Methodism the courage to identify within the Connexion stations where considerable extra personnel resources will be invested? In building large teams the experience of the few of us who have them is that the Connexion on occasions suggests ministers who have struggled elsewhere on the basis that they will be carried by the team. That does not work, just as in commerce and entertainment the very best operate in the C/T centre so must the very best be made available for these flagship stations.
- The Chairs of more urban districts could liaise to create a list of those who are operating in a C/T environment at present who might be encouraged to link with the ministers at present stationed in major C/T appointments. This could work out in terms of coaching, regular visits, sharing in staff meetings etc.
- Some C/T posts might be suitable for either a Presbyter or a Deacon. The understanding of MCCN is that at present it is not possible to submit profiles to both lists. To ensure the appointment of the best person and where there is no specific demand for presbyteral ministry, ie because there is another Presbyter on the team, it would be a great help if profiles could go on both lists.
- The end of priority stationing has created considerable difficulty. In what other area of modern life would any enterprise choose the leaders of key flagship units from just a seventh of the candidates available? There needs to be a conversation as to how specialist C/T appointments can be filled alongside normal stationing.
- One possible solution might be that ministers could ask to be included on a specialist list to be considered for C/T centre appointment, on the understanding that if they are on this list they are willing to move at any time if asked (yes I know that is already so, but this would be an opting in rather than a surprise call!!)
- That a more formal link be made between Fresh Expressions missioner and C/T centre Churches, perhaps with an office and team base, each supporting the other.
- There is, quite rightly, a lock on advertising posts at present. But might the Stationing Committee be the ones to make the decision each year as to which posts might be advertised? That maintains connexional authority, gives order and authority to the situation and allows individuals who feel called to such work to apply, even if they are not due to move.
- Might there be an overlap in some key appointments? Even if only for a month this would be a great help to both the station itself and the person designated to it.
- We acknowledge that where there is an ecumenical dimension the matter is even more difficult.
- That the MCCN should develop a simple training programme, of perhaps 24 hours lunchtime to lunchtime, which those appointed to stations on the MCCN list would be required to attend before they took up their appointment. This would be aimed at better helping those about to be stationed to understand the dynamics, movements and patterns of city life. An emailed induction pack could also be a help, as could mentoring for the first year
- That our two Colleges include units on urban C/T centre ministry in their training programmes, and invite experienced practitioners to come in and share the vision.

A personal reflection and afterthought from the London context from Martin Turner

Worship in a Global City – Where are we heading?

1). Worship will have a strong theological or style emphasis:

This applies more on the evangelical end where there will be a divide between

evangelical/charismatic/open Churches, eg. Holy Trinity Brompton and it's network

and

evangelical/Calvinistic/closed, eg. St.Helen's Bishopsgate, All Souls Langham Place, Westminster Chapel

and

evangelical prosperity model, eg. KICC, Hillsong, Kensington Temple.

There is no key statistical growth pattern if we are talking about theological emphasis on Churches with a liberal emphasis, where there is growth there I would argue it is for other reasons. eg Wesley's Chapel.

- Style will have as much importance in attracting as theology. Modern band based music, emphasis on experience, Spurgeon and Sangster have been replaced by Redman and Hughes!!
- Racial, cultural and national emphasis will be increasing strong and often reflect cultural boundaries from the country of origin.
 - Leadership from royals or chiefs,
 - money sent back home,
 - fierce nationality.
 - sometimes use of another language – e.g., Chinese congregations, offering familiarity, identity – often out of necessity because of language skills level.
- Large congregations will be increasingly strong and well supported, statistical trends show that. They offer the opportunity to participate and receive without needing to commit or contribute.
- Context is important. Cathedrals are a huge growth point for Anglicans (up 35% since 2002). The experience of being in a large, holy, beautiful and historic building is very important to people.
- Excellence is vital – people are used to extremely high standards of music and presentation, they will not settle for poor music, presentation, or context unless there are very strong other reasons such as family or personal links.

2). Where does this leave Methodism? In considerable trouble!

NEGATIVE

- Our lack of continuity in leading worship and preaching does not always give a strong theological emphasis.
- Our pattern of traditional worship does not appeal to the younger generation.
- Our commitment to racial integration is right but not always leading to Church growth. Interestingly the largest congregations in London are now multi-national but not multi cultural.

- Methodism has only 19 congregations of 300+ (I think this needs checking) If large congregations attract and have the resources to offer excellence that smaller ones do not, is Methodism prepared to put in the resources to develop one or two significantly larger congregations in each region?
- Our worship spaces are often rather utilitarian. Sometimes they are also poorly presented and maintained .
- Overall a lack of resources does not lead to excellence.

POSITIVE

- We are a denomination where all can find a welcome and a place.
- We are a model of what the Kingdom of God will be in our many nations and races.
- We have a strong sense of belonging.
- There is immense and unlimited possibility.

ACTION

- If we are to survive in C/T centres the strong need help as much as the weak.
- Specialist ministries need space to flourish.
- There needs to be a financial commitment to excellence.
- We need to develop a deliberate strategy of growing some congregations in order to support the whole denomination, this will require extra staffing