



2008 Conference

Spirituality at the Centre

This report of the conference is based on my notes taken at the time, what I have recalled since, and in the case of Ann Morisy's sessions, what was printed in her handouts. If you were there and remember something that I have omitted, forgotten or just got wrong, or you would like to add to what I have reported then please e-mail me. Nothing I have written should be taken to represent the actual words spoken or written by our speaker.

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Where do you find those spiritual places?

The first session of the conference gave the participants – almost sixty of us – an opportunity to get to know some of our fellows a little better and prepare us for the main theme. We split into four groups and after introducing ourselves and our situations we tried to answer four questions:

- What do you understand by spirituality?
- What areas of your ministry do you find have the most significant spiritual dimensions to them?
- How do we find those spiritual places?
- Are there ways in which, through our work, we can more effectively create spiritual places?

It was apparent in the reports from the four groups at the plenary session that followed that the first question – as might be expected – had provoked a variety of responses and that the the responses to the other three questions had overlapped a great deal.

Spirituality was linked to the big questions, the why-questions that life throws at us. Others saw it in the touch of the other, the glimpse of heaven, a sight of the Kingdom of God. We were offered a 'definition' : the strength to live, the strength to suffer and the strength to die.

One common thread recognised that spiritual places occur unexpectedly in encounters

¹ This e-mail address is temporary and may cease to work. If you e-mail me I will reply with my permanent address. You can always e-mail me through our web site (www.methodistcitycentrechurches.org.uk)

with people usually outside of the our church buildings. It was also pointed out that people can encounter God by entering a church, coming into the community that worships there. Some found spirituality in the quiet and the remote, others in the buzz and the noise. Many secular organisations now have quiet rooms, places design to be 'spiritual', and that spirituality can be experienced in the awe and wonder of a grand building, a cathedral, where people have worshipped or centuries. The deliberate attempt to create spiritual places or spiritual space may fail, and instead it is in the interruptions, the unplanned and the surprising that a experience of spirituality pervades or intrudes. Walking slowly so that encounters with people can occur was recommended; being flexible so that time can be given to the unexpected; being receptive to what others, whatever their background or experience, have to offer; acknowledging our dependence on God in situations where we feel lost for words or ideas – these can all create spiritual places.

Flows fear and faith

After our evening meal we had a first session by our keynote speaker, Ann Morisey. Ann provided handouts for each of her three sessions which provided us with a written version of much of what she was to say. But Ann offered more than just words. Her disarming enthusiasm and her Liverpudlian loquacity added a warm authenticity to her message.

A place is a space with flows, flows of people who are moving through the space. Flows are created by people following the daily routine to work, to school, but are also created by deliberate actions such as Street Pastors and constructions like the Angel of the North. Flows are local and global, seasonal as well as daily. It is the flows that make places special. As city centre churches we need to be aware of the flows near our buildings and think about the flows that we might initiate to create special – spiritual – places.

The more flows there are the more connected a place is. Where there is poverty there is low connectivity and poor flows. The people in such places have a restricted view of the world. Where horizons are narrow there is the risk of anxiety. The contrast with the connectivity of globalisation may prove anxiety.

Anxiety affects everyone. Many people live with long-term anxiety to which they have become accustomed and are not aware of it. Anxiety causes us to react rather than respond, we become more instinctual and cold in our reactions and responses. We look to blame others, to identify a scapegoat, to herd together with like-minded people, and maintain a distance from those we perceive as responsible for the conflict. Herding and distancing may work together to produce hating.

Where anxiety infects communities then it becomes difficult to encourage leadership within the community as the responsibilities of leadership is likely to increase anxiety and reduce resilience, already low because of the initial anxiety. Anxious leaders often over-contribute.

Over fifties anxious about what will become of them when they are old, and look to a bleak and lonely old age.

Anxiety can be dealt with in a number of ways. Ann suggested four *spiritual* habits to cultivate or to inculcate in others:

- become aware of our reactive 'buttons' – the things that people do which trigger unwarranted reactions in us
- discipline our heads and our hearts to recognise that problems have multiple and interrelated causes (from Family System Theory)

- resist picking up other people's anxieties and making them our own – listen and hear and encourage people to take responsibility for their own feelings
- use humour and fun, play and laughter, and laughing at ourselves may be the easiest way

We must learn to be aware of our anxiety, and try to put it out of the way so that we have a chance of reducing it and limit its interference. This may enable us to be a non-anxious presence. The Buddhist notion of 'softening our eyes' can help, as we apparently do unconsciously when looking at a baby.

Faith, 'doing business with God', brings well-being. This is supported by research. It is not money and possessions but a self-emptying way of living that leads to well-being. Well-being is about self-forgetfulness, fun, laughter, creativity,...

In a final few comments Ann said that we undervalue older people, that the pursuit of younger people is one of the Devil's tricks. There is a lot of religious experience out there and we should engage with the passing trade.

We ended the day with a devotional time on the theme of 'Holy Ground' using a litany taken from *Holy Ground: Liturgies and worship resources for an engaged spirituality* by Neil Paynter and Helen Boothroyd (Wild Goose Publications, 2005)

Sacred spaces in hard places

The following morning Ann took up the topic she had originally planned for her third session. She began with the notion of 'vicarious religion'. Many people are pleased that a minority of other people are committed to religious practice, and see that this minority is 'holding a holy place' for them. She pointed out that current comedy (such as *Little Britain*) pushes us back to our creatureliness, and that because we are confident in our creatureliness, the comedy trips us up. How then, if we are confident in our creatureliness, can we help people to have a conversation of the spirit?

She offered the idea of 'apt liturgy' as a term to label those occasions when – whatever the place or time – something happens which lifts the eyes of those involved above the horizon and they respond to those aspects of our humanity that are beyond our creatureliness. The specific event which gives rise to the apt liturgy and on which it focuses involves, a group, a community, or even a nation. She pointed to the establishment of the tomb of 'The Unknown Warrior' after the First World War as an example of apt liturgy, but also gave examples of other occasions where an apt liturgy had occurred spontaneously with a small group. 'Apt liturgy ... is a distinctive and timely offering in response to the loneliness and stress of [our] ordinary earthbound human selves, in our corporate our of need.'

In a short discussion interval the question of how to recognise opportunities for apt liturgy, and should we overcome our reluctance to intrude, or be disrespectful to those who see things differently. Could we? Should we? These questions mark the beginning of mission. We should discuss the possibilities with colleagues. Just join in. It may create a flow and the good thing about flows is that if they don't work out they're soon forgotten. Flows are forgiving and there is a lot of grace in the system. There is an intuitive sense about the person who can speak for all. Jesus shows us how to live – need give that value. There's a tension about using our power or skill. Make people feel like Children of God. Be alongside people, don't use power. Saying 'I'll pray' or 'I am a priest' may put people off.

The distinguishing features of apt liturgy are that it is:

- grounded in people's experience, concerns, or dilemmas
- acknowledges, articulates and respects strong feelings
- promotes a sense of solidarity with and an empathy for others
- suggests new perspectives, enabling understanding and awareness
- provides opportunities for reflection in the light of scripture
- develops a sense of the aloneness of God
- introduces basic religious symbols and concepts that can be pondered over time and drawn on to stimulate hope, confidence and the will for renewal and action.'

There is a growing evidence church buildings are increasingly valued by people in general. However, the traditional symbols (such as the-man-on-the-cross) seen in churches may be all right for adepts but not for others. The people who look after our church buildings may see themselves as there to protect. They need to be trained to offer a generous welcome.

Offering and alternative performance

After a break for a cup of tea or coffee we reassembled for Ann's final session. She started with the idea of performance. Trying to do good can seem like a performance, being an actor. Performance requires reflection and practice before we can give of our best.

The modern human landscape is extraordinarily fragmented. (If we inhabit a landscape that is merely diverse then we are lucky.) Each fragment is doing its own performance, separate from others, with no inclination to recognise, accept, or take from others. Fragments may be diasporic communities that have roots in places all over the world. But there are also indigenous fragments such as the poor white communities. There is a deprivation that arises from only being able to operate in a single culture.

Fragmentation is characterised by

- intense behaviour and use of drink
- loss of trust in people (and institutions)
- a loss of investment in civil society

We were brought up to think that things could only get better. Reason and rationalism along with science and technology guaranteed progress. This utopian view (a positive confidence in progress) has given way to a dystopian view (things can only get worse). We have peddled cheap grace and cheap hope.

Individuals live by a simple creed – I am, I want and I will. We are offered retailing, entertainment, eroticism and addiction and in the end only the last two will be left. We are addicted to addictions without names. We underestimate the addictive potential of our species. (YouTube and similar things suck people in.)

The power of government has withered as it has tried to keep big business happy, concerned that with globalisation business will move elsewhere. It has ceased to be concerned with political freedom because it perceives the threat of terrorism in every shadow and so there is no solidarity. At one time the working class (the poorest stratum of society) were sufficient in numbers that they felt they could challenge government. We have moved from a triangular demography with the bulk – the poorest – at the bottom to

a diamond-shaped demography with the bulk in the unlabelled middle whose interests are at odds with the poor. In this situation democracy will not hold a nation together and the result is puny governance.

Most people who walk past our churches want rid of us. They see people of faith as a remedial group who need to catch up with the rest of society or disappear. Recently the evangelical atheist has appeared on the scene who is hunting down the last word on faith. We are characterised as

- a missionary religion
- wishing to convert and recruit
- all or nothing
- right (and everyone else is a relativist)
- having only one purpose – to worship God (not money, possessions, fame,...) and this is seen as bizarre and sad.

At this point there was opportunity for discussion. The view that people come to our churches for various reasons and their experience is not as they expected., prompted the response that values cannot be communicated this way – it is optimistic to think that ambience communicates. People think we doing whatever we're doing for the money. The not-poor have value and if we create an environment where secular events can happen in a welcoming environment then we evoke a sympathetic response. We need to be good at creating the ambience. Contact with 'regulars' may lead to an apt liturgy. We need stepping stones from the ambience, and patient attention. An aspirational church is not a refuge. The ambience attracts 'the mad and the bad'. But they are not a resource. Where the members of church congregations have family members that have murdered or are addicted then they are no longer fearful of the community in which they live and with help can find their own way. How do we minister to those who are used to being secure who now find themselves insecure? Political parties and government can see faith communities as tools to engender community cohesion. When a government takes up something it tends to lose its power. Methodism cannot decide whether to control or enable. Forty percent of well-being is to do with intentional behaviour. We should not allow circumstances to restrict us.

One of our targets should be structural advantage. This pertains in situations where the power and control lie in the hands of the few whether in communities, in business, or in government. Such structural advantage arises out of an unequal distribution of resources and is often maintained by violence that may be institutional and can range from the damaging or destruction of reputations to kneecapping. City centre churches can get caught up in the trappings of power and influence.

Alastair Macintyre (once a Marxist, now RC) in his final chapter of *After Virtue* suggests we have lost virtue because of fragmentation. We have no narrative, we are making it up as we go along. This is not true, instead we aim to gain profit, gain status, gain power. If this is and remains the dominant view then we are destined for a new dark age.

Analysis is cheap. A different performance is needed. Methodism sees Jesus as bringer of salvation, here to show us how to live. Power is neither good nor bad. Jesus in his forty days in the wilderness was wrestling with the problem of managing power. Methodism had the confidence that people could think for themselves. Jesus risked being overwhelmed – we seek to control. The foundation for an alternative performance that subverts structural advantage involves doing it like Jesus:

- eschewing power
- willing to risk being overwhelmed
- subverting the status quo
- having wide fraternal relations
- avoiding tit-for-tat behaviour
- investing in the most unlikely

Among ideas that kept occurring were:

- We are ashamed of broken people. The church is not trading in brokenness – we present our sorted out selves and this is not welcoming. We are concerned that others may think that only wrecks come to church. Instead we want our church to be full of whole people – this is a sin. An open church is an immediate act of grace. Methodism has a history of working with damaged people. Such people can be turned into generous operators who care beyond the tribe. Methodism has to come strong for this reason – Methodism is/has been the root of health in British history and around the world.
- Weak ties. The idea of a neo-tribe is a group held together by strong ties. However we underestimate the value and power of weak ties – links with people known in passing. We tend to invest in strong ties instead of the myriad weak ties. Weak ties are opportunities for conversational reflection. People come back time and again to our premises creating weak ties with regulars which may lead to an apt liturgy.
- Tunnelling out to something alternative – what will it look like? – do we have confidence in it? At the moment government is tunnelling out, but it is tunnelling into something that is hard to handle. (A number of other situations and contexts were seen to have elements of tunnelling out.)

Methodism – fit for purpose?

Martyn Atkins (General Secretary of the Methodist Church)² joined the conference for the afternoon. He set out in the first of two sessions some of the challenges facing the Methodist Church, and in the second session led a discussion in which we were invited to respond.

If we are to be fit for purpose then we must be fit to be fitted into the purposes of God. Our Calling requires us respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission through:

- worship
- learning & caring
- service
- evangelism

These words are well-known, but when it comes to the Priorities of the Methodist Church the phrase is used but not many are able to articulate the sentences that set them out³.

God is a missionary – renewing, redeeming and restoring. God loves people. God is more

² Martyn stressed that he was setting out some of his thoughts as an individual and not as General Secretary. Nothing of what he said should be taken to indicate the thinking of the connexional team, nor should be taken as a pronouncement of the General Secretary speaking for the Methodist Church.

³ www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openogod.content&cmid=559

avid about rescuing than we are. If a particular 'ecclesiastical entity' is not active where there is a need or work to be done, then God will raise up another one, possibly a new one.

No ecclesiastical unit can do everything. It is impossible for a local church to be the repository of everything local. So we must begin to emphasise and focus on certain elements and recognise the particularity of congregations and not expect that every congregation should strive to do the same thing, but direct their energies to specific needs and responses.

We are a missionary movement raised up to offer Christ. There are trials and tribulations, the bleakness and so on that arise from belonging to Methodism. Nevertheless we need to ask what kind of a community would be of help, have usefulness, offer redemption and engagement with and for today's society. Methodism ticks a lot of the boxes.

Why is this so? Our missionary ecclesiology, once-for-all-ness, the prevenient spirit.

We, like other denominations, have characteristics rooted in our beginnings. Whereas the origins of the United Reform Church are in isolation and persecution and the emphasis on the gathered congregation, and the Baptists because of an attachment to a particular sacramental practice were persecuted and (to some extent) fled abroad, the Methodist Church began out of a conviction that people in Britain who were not attached to a church should be helped to know something of the Gospel, and practised invitation rather than exclusion. This led to the Methodists being parted from (pushed out of) the parent body.

At this point Martyn referred to an article to appear in the Times newspaper by Stephen Plant on the end of Methodism. This article was published the day the conference ended and had the title 'All the world can still be John Wesley's parish' and can be found at:

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article5253443.ece>

The article is wide ranging but at one point Stephen Plant writes:

One possibility might be to maintain a distinctive Methodist identity as a sort of "missionary order" within a united "Church in England". This option has several influential advocates, ... [W]hen Methodists voted overwhelmingly for union with the Church of England in 1969 and 1972, they were agreeing to go out of business as a separate entity. Since then, they have been a Church in search of an identity.

Martyn disagreed with Stephen on this particular view.

Once-for-all-ness: when Christ died it had universal efficacy in all places and at all times. This is the underpinning of the part in the baptismal service which begins: 'For you ...'

From Calvin onwards the 'denominated' spirit of the reform tradition is the prevenient spirit. For Methodists this is the power of God abroad in the world. He is there before us.

Methodism:

- is warm-hearted
- is inclusively inviting ... open and inclusive
- is connected and committed
- is engaged and involved ... often with the marginalised
- is future shaped ... prophetic but not other worldly ... the world

does not have to be the way it is ... this is what young people are looking for – they want to change the world.

- is passionate about God and prayer
- is evangelical not fundamentalist
- is radical but not anarchic
- holds together personal and social Christianity
- is committed to working with other groups
- is committed to be connected – at some cost ... looking at the shape of circuit, district and connexion ... must be committed to connexionalism

God has not given up on us.

We are potentially fit for purpose. But we must become what we are ... again ... today. We must strive for renewal rather than propping up the status quo. There needs to be ‘non-identical reproduction’ manifest as something different. Carl Jung said ‘What is true changes.’

Here Martyn’s presentation gave a long quote from John Wesley which, at the moment, is not available.

The connexion is both a strength and a weakness. It enables response – this is a strength – but the local response is restricted by connexionalism.

How do we focus on the strengths and leave behind the weaknesses?

Despite the careful and almost sacramental process of stationing we do not always put people in the places of that evince potential. We are not as reactive to local situations, opportunities and needs, as we might be.

Our circuits are a strength and a weakness.

- We need to be able to respond differently around the circuit.
- A lot of people in Methodist churches are passive – turn up, pay up, and shut up.
- People in younger congregations (under 45) are a different group of human beings.
- We appear monochrome offering all things to all people. Where is Methodism the movement?

Could we? Should we?⁴ Could we be turned around? Should we be turned around?

We need to find another narrative to live by and, if necessary, die for.

Congregations which one might expect to be the same (because all the parameters and measures have similar values) are often in fact different. It’s all about the narrative. Churches tell stories. There is a narrative bubbling up from underground. For example: Our best years are behind us. What does the future hold? We are going down.

But narratives can be changed – narratives are only the telling of one version of reality.

⁴ Ann Morisey in one of her sessions (at which Martyn was not present) said that ‘Could we? Should we?’ is the beginning of mission.

Twenty-four per cent of Methodist churches grew last year. Five people a week registered to be local preachers.

We need to unlock the possibility of a different narrative – an alternative narrative by which to live.

We can't stay as we are because of the ticking time-bomb of full-time ministry paid ministry. Not enough people offering for the ministry. Next year more than half our ministers will be supernumeraries. We must change or have change thrust upon us.

The recruitment of ministers aged over 40 reinforces a particular kind of ministry. We must recruit younger people to ministry – not necessarily ordained. We need a pastoral, enabling ministry.

The crucial component is a church steeped in prayer and embarking on risk-taking ventures.

Methodism – fit for purpose? Discussion

The comments and questions in this section are unattributed. As is often the case in discussion, contributors do not always make statements or ask questions that are complete as there is an assumed context or background. Little (if any) attempt has been made to remedy any consequent lack of clarity.

People's perception the minister means that young people are not being called – or do not feel called – to be ministers. Rather their call is often to be deacons or lay workers.

How do you sell the ministry?

- We need people and models that enable people to do what they want.
- We need to select well, and provide support and mentoring to create a plural ministry working together.
- 'Faithful' is taken to mean keep the show on the road. 'Faithfulness' as used by Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant deciding to do what he was going to do.

A 24 year-old woman [who had good qualifications and experience of Christian work while at university and who wanted to offer for ministry of some kind was told to go and be a lay worker for two or three years then you'll know what to do. We can understand that she was a bit peeved.

Inclusivity does not transform communities – 'come and join us'.

'Inclusive' is a place to begin but we need to shift the power.

Methodist people want to be better than they are. Give them a vision, however daunting. Yes, even though they cannot ... a feeling of dis-ease. Calling goes on ... conversion lasts all of one's life.

More and more charges are being brought against ministers by people who disagree with what he (or she) is doing. Distracted by the sewerage of the church. This scenario is rare. What is more common is the minister who does not respect the covenantal relationship with the connexion, becomes unbalanced or downs tools and ignores the discipline of the church.

Connexional team reorganisation has been a nightmare, a real strain, and a distraction.

- Reorganisation had to happen (and we are not out of the woods).
- Reduction target was 31% ... team is down 25% and will be 30% by next year from

143 down to 109.

- A lot of time [has been spent] with ‘disaffected groups’ [who] are not used to what they are not going to do any more.
- Districts and regions have more resources and more things to do.
- People don’t appreciate who does what. Help line directs 80% of callers straight to Chairs of District.

There is growth in places (Methodism).

- We are a mission-driven church and where mission is happening the church will enable and facilitate.
- Dialogue rather than pronouncements.
- We, the Methodist church, have no right to a perpetual existence.
- ‘Prepare us for death or renew us’ [Who said this? By Cubans, but in what context?]
- Some things that have been done historically are dying and should be allowed to die. Where we recognise life, how quickly can it be facilitated and resourced. 11% of the connexional budget is disposable. How should it be used? We need to recognise that we should put a disproportionate amount of resources where change may happen.
- It is not just about making] moves (using the analogy of a chess game) it is about policy – other churches don’t hesitate.
- Training must become reactive to the context in which it will be applied.
- Will you as a church go without what you want? Will you make do so that the church can do what you might not want to do.
- Stationing must have a commitment to resourcing places of energy and new life.
- How to tell new narratives ... there is a narrative told and a narrative heard ... receivers/hearers have the ultimate power.
- Human beings are design to receive hope. The narrative of hope has good news stories. We must not collude with a narrative without hope.⁵
- Some are tired of a church talking as if there is no God. A church can choose the narrative it inhabits.

What about the Covenant with the Anglicans?

It does make a difference in some places and in others not a jot. Dovetailing can help at local levels and things can happen.

Ecumenism is no longer the right word. We are in a post-denominational situation. There is a need for liaison with all churches – white, black, charismatic, ... With the URC we do already things together that help both our churches.

We need to release circuit/district advance funds. Only when you’ve got nothing (and are flat on your back) do wonderful things happen. Death or renewal.

Churches that have money will not be given help – could this help others?

The pub culture is dying out ... are we the same? Renewal or revolution?

We are a nation of distinct and different subcultures.

⁵ Ann Morisey talked about ‘enacting hope’.

Suburbia ... smaller churches getting smaller ... and some larger churches getting larger (mobile population) ... house churches ...

70% of our 3800 chapels are neither small nor large. Small churches should not operate as if they were big churches. There are some churches with just enough resources and people] – this may be a recipe for disaster.

When connexion [something⁶] it must not prevent or put difficulties or barriers in the way.

I feel (as a minister) I am not trusted. As we face the future we must be flexible (about Holy Communion) whether we operate in a rigid or free system. We must think about allowing lay people to ... we must change the nature of ordination and open it up. Face the future with locally ordained people. Is our view of ordination ontological or functional ... representative through office.

City centre ministry

- must take notice
- more and more living in the city centre
- greater change than any other construct in Britain
- ecclesia generally must read the runes of city centre work as a guide to what may happen more widely and not de-populate the most urgent situations.

Networking

The final session of the day followed our evening meal. The business of the network was preceded by a short presentation by Angela Connelly who is engaged in doctoral research (part funded by the Methodist Church) at the University of Manchester on the history and development of Methodist central halls. Her presentation explained the results of her work since the MCCN meeting at Gloucester when she introduced her research programme.

The main items of Network business were:

- **The modified Standing Order 440** This now requires changes to the official list of city centre churches a project to come before Methodist Council for comment and approval. The Network had hoped that the revised SO would specifically mention the MCCN but this was not possible as MCCN has no legal status. However, in practice, Methodist Council will refer the matter of changes to MCCN's executive an act on their advice. It was also noted that approval had been given (in principle) to the idea of an overlap period for city centre appointments so that the incoming minister could work alongside the outgoing minister for a period.
- **Reviews** City centre churches and projects on the official list are required to have five-yearly reviews. The Network was reminded of the booklet on reviews available through the web site (www.methodistcitycentrenetwork.org.uk/resources).
- **Constitution** The Network has at present no formal constitution. This had been discussed by the executive. A draft constitution would be presented to an MCCN meeting in the near future.
- **Dates** Two meetings at Harrogate and Darlington had been arranged and the dates for the next conference were agreed. (Details can be found on the website at www.methodistcitycentrenetwork.org.uk/dates)

⁶ I cannot decipher the word that appears here in my notes – KT

New developments – Let's be legally positive

David Walton, the Vice President of the Methodist Conference, having arrived the previous evening led our final session of the conference in which he set out to provide legal advice relating to new building developments. However, he was not long into his prepared presentation when he provoked the first of many questions or comments relating to specific development projects that concerned members of his audience. (In what follows Q: introduces a question from the audience and C: a comment. David, being a lawyer, in responding to question, often equivocated as a clear answer would depend on the exact circumstances.)

David began by quoting Shakespeare: 'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers' [Henry VI, Part 2, Act IV, Scene ii]. He also likened a lawyer to one who helps two people strip for a fight and then runs off with their clothes.

Charities – pros and cons

- the term 'advancement of religion' which implied a church was deemed a charity without argument prior to the 2006 Charities Act
- 2006 Charities Act has the concept of 'public benefit'. It is not clear that religion provides a public benefit. (For us it may be clear that some do and some do not.) For the Methodist Church it is unlikely to be applied retrospectively.

Pros:

- tax advantages – no rates
- gift aid
- no stamp duty
- public confidence

Cons:

- Regulation – can't do what you want (no trading e.g. shops and cafés; no campaigning) Q: Getting money in for charitable purposes should be OK?
- trading restrictions
- 'exclusively charitable purposes' requirement – getting income is not a charitable purpose. Status quo is probably acceptable
- reserves policy ... get the money in and do the charitable work – can't create reserves just for the sake of it ... however buildings need a reserve so some reserves] are justified, but ...
- sale at best price

C: Set up projects as companies limited by guarantee rather than charities.

Q: Should we use these to separate functions?

C: Is a café a trading operation or is it an aspect of the 'charitable work'?

Could be considered charitable if it brings people into the church or is helping people with, say, mental health issues or ...

The status quo won't be challenged when a church with a turnover of more than £100,000 applies for charitable status.

Methodist Church Act (1976)

Some issues (mainly because the act only mentions specifically Methodist aims and objectives):

- ecumenical working
- other partnerships
- interfaith [initiatives and activities]
- conflict between mission needs and legal constraints

Let's be positive

- There is a proposal to free up the consents system so that money, say, from the sale of buildings could be used for various purposes and allow a circuit to do what the it likes (Conference 2009)
- more responsibility will be put on local trustees
- moving from control (by the connexion) to enabling ... the circuit will decide
- still requirements for listed buildings ... but the Methodist Church will continue to have the final say rather than the local authority. (Ours is considered to be the best run system among the Christian denominations.)

Once individual churches are registered as charities the Charity Commission will communicate directly with the local managing trustees normally the church council. (Under the 2006 Act any persons who are part of the controlling group of charity are considered to be trustees whether or not they have been named as such.)

Good Developments

- be prepared ... have appropriately qualified people (from congregation or elsewhere) and a good project manager ... a good team
- set up a separate development company (possibly)
- get good advice
- make sure mission activities are clearly defined
- provide clear client instructions

Although it's voluntary register property with the Land Registry (now!) so that you can

- clear up the title
- discover 'nasty' covenants and easements
- reveal occupiers with statutory rights

After our morning coffee break we gathered together for Holy Communion. Phil Mason was the celebrant and David Walton assisted.

The conference closed with lunch.