

## The MethodistChildren Journey



Every journey begins, and continues, with single steps.

This document

- describes the direction of the steps we believe are needed if we are to go further on the journey towards excellent and effective children's ministry
- lays out some, but not all, of the steps which we believe are important for churches, circuits and districts to take and
- details the steps which MethodistChildren will take to support the children's ministry of local churches.

### **The Priority of The Methodist Church in Britain is**

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

- Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer
- Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide
- Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved
- Encouraging fresh ways of being Church
- Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible.

The Connexional Team addresses those tasks within these priorities, which are best done or can only be done connexionally.

MethodistChildren is that part of the Connexional Team which supports the Methodist Church's work with and for children.

### **The Priority of MethodistChildren is**

- To help the Methodist Church realise its priorities in the work it does with and for all children aged 0-13.
- To enable every part of the church to hear the voice of children.
- To engage children with issues relating to the mission of the church and empower them to take action.

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### We are a Church of all ages

#### Children are an important part of the Methodist Church because

- Jesus shows us adults must learn from children
- Children make the Church better
- At least 25% of our Church is under 18.

Children are a gift to the Church. The Lord of the Church sets them in the midst of the Church today, as in Galilee, not as objects of benevolence, nor even as recipients of instruction, but in the last analysis as patterns of discipleship. The Church that does not accept children unconditionally into its fellowship is depriving those children of what is rightfully theirs, but the deprivation such a Church will suffer is far more grave. *The Child in the Church BCC 1976*

#### The Methodist Church prioritises work with children because:

- Jesus tells us to
- God speaks and acts through children
- Our society is healthier if children are nurtured and listened to.

1. Children are equal partners with adults in the life of the church
2. The full diet of Christian worship is for children as well as adults
3. Learning is for the whole church, adults and children
4. Fellowship is for all – each belonging meaningfully to the rest
5. Service is for children to give, as well as adults
6. The call to evangelism comes to all God's people of whatever age
7. The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully through children as well as adults
8. The discovery and development of gifts in children and adults is a key function of the church
9. As a church community we must learn to do only those things in separate age groups, which we cannot in all conscience do together
10. The concept of the "Priesthood of all Believers" includes children. *URC Charter for Children*

#### The Methodist Church commits itself to work with children by:

- Affirming and resourcing the 20,000 active paid and unpaid children's and youth workers, as we do our 2,000 presbyters and our 6,000 local preachers.
- Planning for good and growing work throughout our Church and measuring our standards and progress; around 28% of Methodist churches are already reporting growth in their children's or young peoples work.

- The Church will welcome you.
- The Church will accept and value you.
- The Church will work to meet your needs.
- The Church will be Christ-like in its approach to you.
- The Church will nurture you in faith and worship.
- The Church will provide you with appropriate teaching.
- The Church will offer you relevant worship.
- The Church will encourage you to serve others.
- The Church will endeavour to provide you with a sense of community.
- The Church will support you in sharing the Good News of Christ in word and deed.

*Church of England 2001*

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### **The Journey**

MethodistChildren exists to help all parts of the Methodist Church take their next step on the journey to good and growing children's work in confidence and with the benefit of the learning, experience and resources generated in other parts of the Connexion and the wider Church.

With this in mind, MethodistChildren has identified three key areas that all need to be addressed for the journey to progress well.

#### **Learn**

Adults and children learn.

Adults who work with children need particular training.

#### **Pray**

Prayer is an important part of our individual life as a Christian and of our corporate life as a Church.

Children are entitled to learn about prayer and be part of the prayer life of the Church.

#### **Serve**

The Church is called to serve its local community, children and adults.

As part of the World Church we play our part in serving God's justice in the whole world.

### Learn

If this vision for an improving ministry among children is to be successfully realised, there needs to be a widespread agreement on the importance of ministry among children, a readiness to learn about changing cultures and needs and creative discussion about the church's response.

In churches where the importance of this ministry is accepted, there will often be wholehearted and wide-ranging discussions about the possibilities before each church and decisions about what new developments can and should be undertaken. There will be clarity about the extent and quality of support that are necessary for effective ministry among children.

If The Methodist Church in Britain as a whole accepts its importance, there will be changes to facilitate the participation of children and an expectation of good basic training for all ministers, local preachers and children's workers.

We all need training for some of the tasks we do. At its best training is immensely enjoyable and worthwhile. Becoming a driver or a local preacher without training is unthinkable. Similarly the rules of The Methodist Church in Britain say no one can start ministry among children without training. The Methodist Church as a whole benefits from the work of its 20,000 volunteer children's workers and commits itself to making training for them easily available, enjoyable and worthwhile. The basic training for children's work is Core. This training course, published with ecumenical partners in 2006, has six sessions, children, community, leaders, planning, pastoral awareness and spirituality and the Bible. The sessions can be done as a course or individually.

Children are an important part of the Church. They are also vulnerable, so their care and nurture should have the highest priority. However, training for this ministry can be, at present, haphazard or optional. Many adults working with children have not been offered accessible training in the Christian faith or in the ways that children develop and learn. Training for ministry among children does not often form an explicit part of formation for ministers and local preachers. As part of its commitment to children The Methodist Church commits itself to making training about children's work readily available to those thousands of adults who give so generously of their time and talents for this work.

### Destination

1. Good and growing children's work, a culture in the Church which encourages the participation of children and communication about God and faith in ways that make sense to all ages.
2. Accepted guidelines on the training, employment, conditions of service, expectations and support of both voluntary and paid workers with children and young families.
3. An enthusiastic network of children's workers, who feel affirmed by their local church and have opportunity to share ideas and experience about the variety of children's activities, including new and fresh ways, in which a local church can be involved and the resources available to support them.
4. High quality accessible training for all involved in children's work.

### Steps for churches & circuits

1. Regularly pray for children and the issues that especially affect them.
2. Make NCH, JMA and MAYC World Action visible in every Methodist church.
3. Pray weekly for all children's work run by the church or on church premises.
4. Annually commission and affirm workers with children and young people using The Methodist Worship Book or a similar form.
5. Ensure new children's workers have the support and training they need and complete the CORE introductory session and Safeguarding training before the end of their probationary period and complete CORE within their first two years of work.

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6. Provide a budget for work with children and young people.
7. Reassess job descriptions and training needs annually.
8. Follow Safeguarding policy.
9. Develop opportunities for children to participate at all levels of the church.

### **Steps for Districts**

1. Make it possible for every children's worker to have easy access to the required CORE Skills and Safeguarding training, in ecumenical groups whenever possible.
2. Encourage the development and use of accredited training provided by local authorities and higher and further education institutions for both paid and voluntary children's workers.
3. Develop opportunities for children to participate at all levels of the Church.

### **Steps for MethodistChildren**

1. Offer advice and networking to the Connexion.
2. Develop ways of including children in decision-making.
3. Listen to children and ensure that children are involved in the Church's Priorities.
4. Help children to learn, pray, and serve with the worldwide Church through JMA.
5. Lead with national initiatives for the Methodist Church in children's work.
6. Build and sustain ecumenical networks.
7. Contribute to Connexional events.
8. Help the Church to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by changing situations and needs, local government projects, the actions of denominations and agencies or innovative resources from Christian publishers and others.
9. Produce and keep updated a Methodist Church Children's Workers' Handbook for all paid and volunteer workers with children setting out basic policies, brief guidance on good practice (including safeguarding), the aims and theology of Methodist children's work, a sample job description, probationary requirements, training record, sources of information and resources, circuit, district and connexional contacts.
10. Develop and strengthen the network of children's workers through the MethodistChildren website, e-newsletter and the sharing of experience and resources.
11. Strengthen mechanisms to ensure that Districts and the Connexional Team have adequate information to measure progress and assess needs.
12. Devise better ways for the Church to hear all its children and young people, in church councils, in circuit meetings, in district synods, in Methodist Council and at Methodist Conference. Work with Methodist Council to enable Conference to keep children on its agenda every year either through annual reports, submissions from children, or the actual presence of children.
13. Work with Training and Development Officers and District Children's Teams to ensure that recommended training is easily available. Ensure that training for church children's workers is compatible with government requirements and able to be accredited.
14. Make space for children's workers to find support and refreshment through prayer, retreats, etc.
15. Develop and implement the Methodist Training Framework for Children's Work.

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### Pray

Our core aims for children in the Church is that they should, in ways suitable to their age, culture and stage of faith, have the chance to grow personally, spiritually, socially, politically and educationally and increase their knowledge and love of God in pilgrimage with other Christians.

We grow best when:

- we **feel valued** as individuals
- our real **learning needs** are recognised and addressed
- we have our **experience** acknowledged and are enabled to **reflect critically** on it
- we have the opportunity to **learn from each other**
- we nurture a **learning community** that is both valuing and challenging
- we are asked to **question** our current assumptions and practice
- we are expected to **take responsibility** for our own learning
- we are able to **use our existing gifts** and talents

Methodist Conference 2001

### Destination

- Increasing participation of children in well-led, God-centred worship and prayer.
- Quality help for children of all ages, cultures and abilities to learn about and develop confidence in the Christian faith, the Bible, being part of the Church and Christian living.
- Activities that help children to develop a lively and searching approach to values and attitudes in their faith and in society

### Steps for churches & circuits

1. Develop an organised pattern of nurture for children and young people aged 0-18. Early, positive experiences of worship and good Christian nurture are important in developing spiritually as are the recognition of key stages and clear progression.
2. Ensure that all those involved in programme planning for the nurture and worship of children and families are aware of the variety of resources that are available and are plugged in to the right networks.
3. Allow the enquiring minds and spiritual openness of young children to be a constant challenge and encouragement.
4. Encourage and enable children and young people to take an increasingly significant part in the life of the Church, including, when they are ready, by sharing their faith, taking a lead in worship, offering fresh ideas, helping the Church have fun.
5. Consider providing new ways or times to worship, when children and young people can participate and lead.

### Steps for MethodistChildren

1. Identify and make known examples of good practice and resources for worship and learning with children
2. Review and publicise learning materials that
  - enable opportunities for children to have an encounter with the living God
  - give the information that children need for their basic Christian formation
  - help children face the implications of being a Christian in everyday life

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- equip children and families for their faith journey
  - explore how children's ministry benefits the Church.
3. Find means by which children are empowered to belong fully and confidently in their faith communities and make training and resources available to support this.
  4. Engage all ages in the struggle for justice.

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### Serve

The Church's role in its community is about witness by presence as much as about teaching and faith-sharing. It is about being Christ in the playground, sports club or pre-school group as much as in Church-led activities. It involves working in the community through local initiatives and organisations.

Jesus put a child in the middle and said, in the strongest possible terms, don't make life difficult or impossible for children. As well as working with children in and around our churches, because we believe we have good contributions to make, we have the responsibility to speak and act more widely in relation to those things in our communities and our world which make life difficult or impossible for children. We cannot but act in the face of the inequality of opportunity that is a feature of childhood in this country and we are impelled to speak out about the ever-growing gap between the rich countries of this world and the poor especially on behalf of children who bear the brunt of injustice, poverty and violence.

The Methodist Church in Britain is a small part of the world-wide Church of Jesus Christ, an exciting and world-changing movement. The work of the Church with children and young people must reflect that, and have a global focus. In the words of the JMA promise, we must learn, pray and serve; learn about the situation and the issues, pray for children and for those with power, serve with our actions for justice and with our money. NCH, JMA and MAYC World Action must be visible in every Methodist church, and inspiring learning about God's justice in every children's and young people's group.

### Destination

- Children's work as part of the development plan in every circuit, appropriate to their situation and resources.
- Creative collaboration with other agencies and organisations concerned with children.
- JMA, World Action and NCH visible in every Methodist Church in Britain and support for their work in community development and action for justice.

### Steps for churches and circuits

1. Support a Strategy Group for children's work which can support existing work and consider new opportunities. (See also under 'District' below.)
2. Include children's ministry as part of any development plan for a church or the circuit.
3. Speak out on issues of justice affecting children.
4. Make children an integral part of the church's profile in the community through holiday activities, midweek clubs and pastoral work.
5. Develop work with under 5s and their families.
6. Work creatively on the relationships between churches and local schools and consider the options offered through extended schools initiatives.

### Recommended Steps for Districts

1. Develop opportunities for children to participate at all levels of the church.
2. Provide an adequate budget for children's work, considering possible sources of grants and likely partners for new or developing work.
3. Through a District Children's Team or similar, sharing tasks with circuit teams where possible,

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- Agree a development strategy drawing on ideas available from other districts and support from MethodistChildren.
- Engender a widespread passion for work with children.
- Enable the voice of children in the District to be heard.
- Ensure there are sufficient trainers and training opportunities for children's workers.
- Utilise the Core network and other ecumenical links to maximise training.
- Act as a link with the children's ministry of the rest of the Connexion.
- Develop a focus on the mission of the Church and promote JMA as a Methodist success story and as integral to our understanding of Children's Ministry.
- Be a presence in the District and its Synod.
- Publicise children's ministry resources with the help of MethodistChildren
- Be part of children's events.
- Link with other parts of the Connexion through the MethodistChildren e-newsletter and website and by being represented at the MethodistChildren Consultation.

### **Steps for MethodistChildren**

1. Develop networks to facilitate the sharing of stories about good and innovative work.
2. Promote strategies for improving the extent and quality of The Methodist Church's work with children.
3. Speak out on national and global issues of justice affecting children.
4. Monitor legislative and cultural developments and identify potential new styles or areas of work.
5. Maintain links with partner churches and mission partners. Develop JMA as a resource for all children's work.

### **Recommended Steps for Conference**

1. Recognise CORE as the basic requirement in training for adults working with children in the Church.
2. Make training for ministry among children part of all ministerial and local preacher training.
3. Encourage the development of opportunities for children to participate at all levels of the church and consider the most effective way to ensure that children are involved in Conference.
4. Consider how Council and Conference might include proper representation of children in decision-making.



### The MethodistChildren Destinations

1. Good and growing children's work; a culture in the Church which encourages the participation of children and communicates about God and faith in ways that make sense to all ages.
2. Accepted guidelines on the training, employment, conditions of service, expectations and support of both voluntary and paid workers with children and young families.
3. An enthusiastic network of children's workers, who feel affirmed and well resourced by their local church, with plenty of opportunities to share ideas and experience about the variety of children's activities, including new and fresh ways, in which a local church can be involved.
4. High quality accessible training for all involved in children's work.
5. Increasing participation of children in well-led, God-centred worship and prayer.
6. Quality help for children of all ages, cultures and abilities to learn about and develop confidence in the Christian faith, the Bible, being part of the Church and Christian living.
7. Activities that help children to develop a lively and searching approach to values and attitudes in their faith and in society
8. Children's work as part of the development plan in every circuit, appropriate to their situation and resources.
9. Creative collaboration with other agencies and organisations concerned with children.
10. JMA, World Action and NCH visible in every Methodist Church in Britain and support for their work in community development and action for justice.

### Some Questions about the Destinations for children's groups

*The numbers at the end of each question refer to the Destinations above.*

What is 'good and growing children's work'? What is good about the children's work in your church? (1)

What 'new and fresh' things might your church do with or for children? (3)

What do children's workers need to be good at? What should be in 'high quality training'? (4)

How could children participate in well-led worship and prayer? (5)

What Christian things are easy to talk about? Which are hard? (6)

Make a list of good and bad things you see in the world, near or far. Then list things that Christians might do to celebrate or change some of them. (7)

Thinking about children who don't get involved with church things, what would make them interested? (8)

Who should we be linking up with? (9)

What do you know about JMA, World Action or NCH? What can you see of them in your church?

Think of new ways to learn, pray or serve using them. (10)