

Circuit Consultation “Toddling”



October 2010

Why toddling?

The Leadership Team had an away day on Saturday 2 October 2010 facilitated by Michael Noble and Ruth Parry from the District Mission Enabling Team. The purpose of the day was to discern God’s will for us as a Circuit. One of the first exercises was for each member of the team to find a word to describe where they felt the Circuit is at the end of its first year. “Toddling” was one of those words; it provided a useful metaphor that we kept coming back to throughout the day.

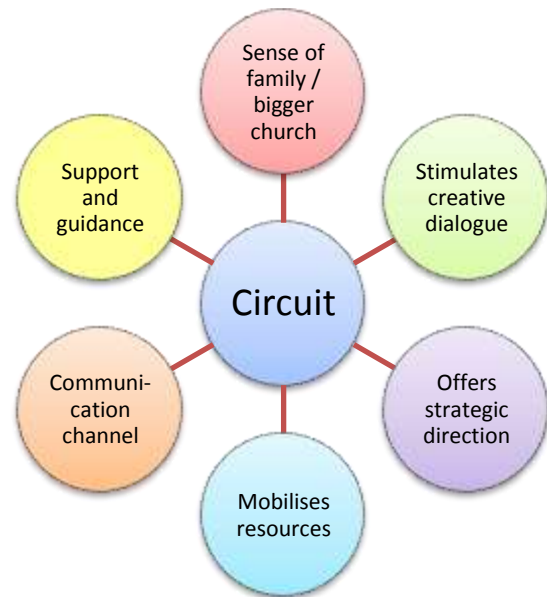
As we shared our experiences we found that some “toddlers” could see the way before us but unforeseen obstacles had knocked us off of our feet. Some “toddlers” are resilient enough to get up, dust themselves off and start over again, whilst others need to pause for a cuddle and a little more tender loving care. Other “toddlers” are excited about what is before us, but cannot quite work out how we move our feet to take us forward.

So, how can we as a circuit get through this toddling phase and steady ourselves to walk forward in our discipleship?

What is a circuit?

In a later exercise we split into two groups to consider what is this thing we call “Circuit”? One group went back to basics and considered the needs of the local

church whilst the other looked at “circuit” and how it might serve the local church. Although they were quite different starting points, there were many similarities in our thinking captured here:



What is church?

To introduce our session, Ruth considered “church” as a noun ie the building, and “church” as a verb, ie a way of doing. Again, this was something that we returned to at various points throughout the day. We spent some time considering how we measure “success” and given that we are in October when we traditionally do a head count of those in our churches, we recognised that success could equally, if not more appropriately, be measured by the relationships we forge outside of Sunday worship.

First steps

Although we raised many questions for which we had no answers, we were encouraged that we had developed sufficiently as a team to be able to openly express our feelings and concerns; a dialogue that would not have been possible a year ago.

We acknowledged the practical challenges and tensions for presbyters providing pastoral oversight to three or four churches and the expectations of a minister being all things to all people. We recognised that for some of our presbyters church as a noun is a barrier to them fulfilling their calling of church as a verb. We accepted the need to find more creative and sustainable ways of working to allow the things that energise staff to firstly outweigh those things that de-energise and secondly be used to full potential for the good of the circuit.

We have to recognise and accept that with a diminishing number of ministers across the Connexion we need to look at alternative ways of doing things. We need to identify those things that must be undertaken by a presbyter and consider how other duties might be carried out by lay appointments. As an example, the Circuit might be better served by reducing the number of presbyters and appointing a lay worker to deal with building projects.

We also acknowledged that most of our churches are doing wonderful things; however, we were equally concerned that here too there is a temptation to try to be all things to all people and perhaps we can be more empowered if we each play to our strengths and release ourselves from the burden of endeavouring to be something we are not.

Church as a verb

In a previous leadership meeting we had mooted the idea of two ways of being church as a verb and we again returned to consider these concepts:

Fellowship church

A Fellowship church recognises its limitations in reaching beyond itself, and settles for a life of good fellowship. It will not expend resources or effort on mission, and therefore not expect the circuit to resource it for mission either. A fellowship church will focus on gathered worship and the pastoral care of its members and adherents.

Mission church

A Mission church recognises the imperative of reaching beyond itself, and the need to be constantly reflecting on its life and flexible in its approach. It will see mission as having priority over maintenance, and will use its resources accordingly. A mission church will see its gathered worship as equipping its members for mission in their everyday lives and

communities, and will seek to enable its members to grow in their discipleship.

Next steps

So where do we go now? Well, we think our circuit staff and stewards and local churches need to identify our strengths, consider whether we might be more attuned to a fellowship church or a mission church and reflect on what resources we need at both a local and circuit level for sustainable development.

We, therefore, ask you to consult with your congregation to consider:

1. What are your strengths?
2. How do those strengths relate to being a fellowship church or a mission church – do you identify with one more than the other?
3. If you were to go forward as either a fellowship church or a mission church,
 - a. what resources can you offer to sustain its development?
 - b. what is your wish list of resources and support from the circuit to sustain its development?

The circuit staff and stewards are also being asked to make their individual responses.

These are searching questions and answers may not come easily. It is, therefore, important for you to find an appropriate way to make space for Christian conferring and reflection.

That being said, we are conscious of the need to maintain the focus and momentum generated by our away day. To concentrate deliberations, therefore, we ask for your responses to be sent to the circuit office **no later than Friday 12 November 2010** so that the leadership team can start matching gifts and talents with aspirations and thereby develop a clearer vision for the next stage of our development as a circuit.