

Summary Overview

South Bedfordshire Methodist Circuit Vision Day – April 2026

This summary provides an accessible overview of the key themes, insights, and emerging directions from the Circuit Vision Day. The full report offers a more detailed theological and narrative account for those who wish to explore further. A full appendix of raw feedback—including table flip charts, post-it notes, and verbal contributions—is included at the end of the document to ensure transparency and to honour the breadth of voices shared.

A Day of Discernment, Not Planning

The Vision Day was not designed to produce a strategic plan or immediate decisions. Instead, it invited the Circuit into a shared act of discernment—listening for where God is already at work and where God may be leading next.

The guiding image of a forest shaped the day: a living ecology made up of diverse churches, each at different stages of growth, health, and change. Participants were encouraged to notice honestly: Where life is flourishing, Where energy feels stretched or thin, Where something may be coming to a faithful completion.

A key theological insight was repeated throughout: endings are not failures, but part of God’s wider work of renewal and fruitfulness.

Key Themes Across the Day

1. A Diverse and Faithful Circuit

There was strong affirmation that the Circuit is already expressing a rich diversity of church life. Churches serve very different contexts—urban, suburban, and rural—and this variety is a strength rather than a problem. There was a clear rejection of the idea that there is one model of “successful church.”

2. Capacity Is Under Strain

Across the Circuit, a consistent theme emerged: too few people are carrying too much responsibility. Many volunteers hold multiple roles over long periods. Administrative and building demands are increasing. Tiredness and reduced joy were honestly acknowledged. Faithfulness is strong—but sustainability is a growing concern.

3. Strong Community Engagement, Weaker Pathways into Faith

Churches are deeply embedded in their communities through: Warm spaces, foodbanks, and lunch clubs. Schools work and local partnerships. Ecumenical activity and outreach initiatives

However, a key gap was identified: How do people move from community engagement into discipleship, belonging, and faith?

4. Children, Young People and Leadership

This was one of the most emotionally significant areas: Some churches are thriving with young people contributing actively to worship and leadership Others have very few or none, creating a sense of

vulnerability. A “missing generation” (roughly ages 40–55) was widely noted. There is both encouragement and urgency in this area.

5. Letting Go and Facing Change

Conversations about possible endings—of buildings, patterns, or even churches—were difficult but important. Many expressed grief and anxiety but also relief in being able to speak honestly. A shared insight emerged: Faithfulness is not about preserving everything, but about offering what has been for God’s future purposes.

Reflections on the Four Circuit Priorities

Rooted in Faith (Spiritual Depth)

There are clear signs of spiritual growth: Children and young people actively involved in worship, Growing participation in prayer, Bible study, and fellowship, Faith lived out in community service. However, many churches struggle to make space for prayer and listening: Meetings dominated by practical concerns, Limited time for discernment. Key need: Rebuild shared rhythms of prayer, stillness, and listening

Growing in Love (Community & Relationships)

Churches are deeply engaged in their communities: Warm spaces, cafés, and social activities, Support for vulnerable people and local partnerships, Strong ecumenical connections in many areas. But an important challenge emerged: How do we move from hosting activities to building relationships?

There is also a desire to be more inclusive and representative, adapt worship and church life to changing communities and listen more intentionally to what people need

Nurturing the Future (Leadership & Young People)

Where young people are present and trusted, they flourish: Leading worship, music, and services, Growing in confidence and faith. However: Many churches lack younger generations, Leadership is often dependent on a small number of people. Confidence and capacity to step into roles are limited. Key need: Intentional identification, encouragement, and development of leaders at all ages. This is widely seen as not solvable by individual churches alone, but requiring circuit-wide thinking.

Stewarding God’s Gifts (People & Resources)

There is deep gratitude for the gifts and commitment of people—but also real strain: Volunteers are overextended, Roles are difficult to fill, Bureaucracy and administration are increasing. Other challenges include: Duplication of effort across churches, Building maintenance costs. Rising energy costs. At the same time, there is encouragement through: Eco Church initiatives, Shared community use of buildings. Key insight: Stewardship is about sustaining people, not just maintaining systems

Completion, Not Failure

A central theme of the afternoon was the courage to recognise when things may be coming to a natural end.

Participants were invited to reflect on: Where energy is draining rather than renewing, What may be reaching the end of its season, What new possibilities might emerge if something were released

This reframing—from failure to offering—was experienced as freeing. It opened space for new imagination: Shared or merged church expressions, Reimagined use of buildings, More flexible, outward-looking forms of church

What Might Be Waiting to Be Born

When freed from assumptions about preserving existing structures, participants showed real openness to new possibilities: Church beyond Sunday (midweek, outdoor, digital, pop-up), Stronger ecumenical partnership based on locality, Circuit-wide approaches to young people and leadership, Creative use, sharing, or release of buildings. At the same time, there was an important reminder: The church is not a consumer organisation seeking to “attract people,” but a community discerning what God is calling it to be and do.

Overall Direction

The Vision Day revealed a Circuit that is: Faithful and committed, Honest about its challenges, Open to change, but understandably cautious. There is no single solution. Instead, the way forward involves: Deepening prayer and discernment, Strengthening relationships (within and beyond church), Using resources more sustainably, Working more collaboratively, Having courage to both try new things and let go where needed

Final Encouragement

This was not a day of decisions, but a day of truth-telling, listening, and courage. The invitation that remains is not to rush into action, but to: Pay attention, Walk prayerfully, Trust that God is already at work

Like a forest, this Circuit contains growth, maturity, and completion—all at the same time. Nothing offered faithfully is wasted.

Vision Day Report

Saturday 25th April, 2026

Purpose of this report

This report offers an account of the discernment, themes and emerging directions from the South Bedfordshire Circuit Vision Day held on Saturday 25 April 2026 at Newland Church, Luton. It is written to support prayerful reflection and shared understanding across the Circuit, particularly for those who were unable to attend, and to provide a narrative foundation for future conversations and decisions.

The day was intentionally not framed as a planning exercise. Instead, it was shaped theologically around the image of a forest: a living, mixed ecology made up of different species, ages and seasons. Vision was understood as an act of faithful noticing — attending honestly to where life is flourishing, where it feels thin or strained, and where something may be reaching completion. Throughout the day there was a repeated emphasis that endings are not failures, and that God’s faithfulness is not measured by preservation but by fruitfulness offered for the sake of the whole.

Big themes heard across the day

Across the various conversations several themes surfaced repeatedly, regardless of church size, context or location.

1. There was strong affirmation that the Circuit already reflects a mixed ecology. Churches are responding creatively and faithfully to very different contexts — villages, estates, town centres and new housing areas — and these differences were not experienced as a problem to solve, but as a strength to be honoured. Participants repeatedly resisted the idea that there should be a single preferred model of “successful” church.
2. There was deep honesty about capacity and energy. Many churches are sustained by a small number of committed people who carry multiple roles and responsibilities. While this faithfulness was acknowledged with gratitude, it was also named as unsustainable in the long term. Several people spoke openly about tiredness, diminishing joy, and the sense that administration and maintenance too often crowd out prayer, imagination and mission.
3. Contrast between strong community engagement and weaker discipleship pathways. Across the Circuit there is impressive involvement in community life — warm spaces, lunch clubs, dementia cafés, food provision, schools work and ecumenical activity. However, people recognised that clearer, gentler pathways are often needed to help those who engage with church activities explore faith, belonging and leadership more deeply.
4. Strong and emotionally charged conversation about children, young people and the future of leadership. Some churches are flourishing with young people who are confidently leading worship, contributing musically and taking responsibility. Others have few or none, and feel increasingly fragile as a result. Many participants resonated with the idea of a “missing

generation”, particularly among those aged roughly 40–55, whose absence has significant implications for leadership and sustainability.

5. Striking mixture of anxiety and relief as people spoke about letting go. Naming the possibility that some churches, buildings or patterns of ministry may be nearing the end of their faithful season felt painful, but many also described a sense of freedom in being allowed to speak honestly. Beneath this was a shared desire for courage — not to cling out of fear, but to act faithfully and generously.

Circuit Priority Reflections

The morning was spent in discussion and reflection around the four Circuit priorities; ***Rooted in Faith, Growing in Love, Nurturing the Future and Stewarding God’s Gifts.***

Rooted in Faith

Deepening discipleship, spirituality and discernment

- Deepening spirituality and discipleship
- Continuing circuit listening and discernment
- Encouraging churches in discovering their future stories

Questions discussed

- ***Where have we seen spiritual growth this year — in individuals, churches, or across the circuit?***
- ***How have we created space for listening to God rather than simply planning activity?***
- ***Where might we need to slow down, pray more deeply, or discern more carefully?***

When reflecting on what it means to be rooted in faith, participants identified clear and encouraging signs of spiritual growth across the circuit. This is most visible in the increasing involvement of children and young people, who are actively participating in worship through music, readings, leadership, and creative contribution. In some contexts, their engagement is also drawing in parents and shaping new expressions of church life. Alongside this, a wide range of activities—such as prayer services, Bible studies, pastoral initiatives, fellowship gatherings, and community outreach including foodbanks, lunch clubs, and local events—are helping to nurture discipleship and build stronger, more connected communities. There is a growing sense that faith is being lived out both within and beyond Sunday worship.

At the same time, participants spoke honestly about the challenge of sustaining a deep and attentive spiritual life. The pressure of practical responsibilities—especially around buildings, finance, and governance—often limits the space available for prayer and discernment. While there is a strong desire to listen more intentionally to God, many churches feel they lack the time, confidence, or shared practices to do this well. There were calls for more intentional rhythms of prayer, such as dedicated prayer gatherings, spaces for silence, and leadership meetings shaped by discernment rather than simply planning.

Overall, the tension is not a lack of commitment to faith or discipleship, but the difficulty of holding together active church life with spiritual depth. Without greater attention to prayer, listening, and

shared spiritual practices, there is a risk that activity becomes disconnected from calling. The emerging priority is therefore to create space—individually and collectively—to slow down, pray deeply, and ensure that the life of the church remains firmly rooted in God.

Growing in Love

Community presence, relationships and inclusion

- Community engagement
- Inter-church relationship building
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Questions discussed

- ***Where have we seen meaningful engagement with our communities?***
- ***How are relationships across churches developing?***
- ***In what ways are we becoming more welcoming, inclusive, and representative of our communities?***
- ***Where are we stretched?***

Stories of community engagement were abundant and encouraging, reflecting a strong commitment to expressing faith through service and presence. Churches described a wide range of activities that are building meaningful connections, including warm spaces developed since COVID, dementia cafés, lunch clubs, community gardens, seated exercise groups, and partnerships with schools and local organisations. Outreach through foodbanks, support for asylum seekers, and creative initiatives such as Messy Church, prayer breakfasts, and events on village greens are helping churches engage with a broad cross-section of their communities. Ecumenical relationships—particularly through Churches Together, Walks of Witness, and shared services—were highlighted as especially valuable where they are rooted in local relationships.

Many churches recognised their buildings as important assets for welcome and hospitality, hosting community groups, other congregations, and activities that draw people in. In some places, this has led to natural opportunities for conversation, relationship-building and visibility within the community. However, a key question emerged about the depth of this engagement: whether churches are moving beyond providing space to forming intentional relationships. There was a growing awareness that simply hosting activities is not the same as being present within them, and that deeper connection requires both visibility and participation from church members.

Participants also reflected on the changing nature of their communities. In some areas, increasing cultural and religious diversity, or shifts in local population, have made engagement more complex and raised questions about how worship and church life can become more accessible and relevant. Suggestions included exploring more interactive and contemporary forms of worship, creating space for silence and reflection, and connecting biblical teaching more clearly with everyday life.

A further theme was the challenge of inclusion and capacity. Many churches expressed a desire to be more representative and welcoming to a wider range of people, including younger generations, different cultural backgrounds, and those who do not currently see themselves reflected in church life. At the same time, there was an honest recognition of limited capacity, with fewer people

available to lead activities or sustain outreach. This has led some to question what is realistic, where to focus energy, and what their role should be in the future.

Overall, the feedback points to a strong foundation of community engagement, with creativity, generosity and openness evident across the circuit. The emerging challenge is to deepen these connections into relationships, to listen more intentionally to local communities, and to ensure that engagement is sustainable, inclusive, and rooted in a clear sense of calling.

Nurturing the Future

Children, young people and emerging leaders

- Youth work
- Young leadership
- Succession planning

Questions discussed

- ***Where are we seeing young people flourish or step into leadership?***
- ***How are we identifying and encouraging new leaders of any age?***
- ***What feels fragile or under-resourced here?***

Where children and young people are present, churches spoke with real enthusiasm about the difference it makes when they are trusted with meaningful responsibility. Participation in music groups, Bible readings, drama, technical roles, and even positions such as assisting with finances is helping young people grow in confidence and ownership. Approaches that encourage gradual involvement—identifying gifts, giving space to try, and offering support without overwhelming commitment—were seen as particularly effective. Activities such as holiday clubs, uniformed organisations, and all-age worship are also creating pathways for younger people to engage and begin developing leadership skills.

However, many churches highlighted the fragility of this area. In some places, young people tend to drift away in late teens, while others face an ageing congregation with few younger members coming through. This has led to a strong shared recognition that nurturing the future cannot be approached in isolation. There is growing interest in greater collaboration across the circuit—through mentoring, sharing resources, or creating opportunities for young leaders to connect—so that individuals are not isolated and churches can learn from one another.

The conversation also pointed to a wider leadership challenge across all ages. Many churches are increasingly dependent on a small number of committed individuals, often already carrying significant responsibility. Limited capacity, concerns about time commitment, and lack of confidence can make it difficult to invite others into leadership roles. At the same time, there is awareness that new leaders will only emerge if they are intentionally identified, encouraged, and supported. This includes not only children and young people, but also those in mid-life who may form a vital bridge in sustaining and nurturing future generations.

Overall, the feedback highlights both opportunity and vulnerability. There is clear energy and potential where people of all ages are enabled to contribute, but also an urgent need to invest in leadership

development, adapt approaches to engage younger generations, and build more sustainable, shared models of ministry for the future.

Stewarding God's Gifts

People, resources and creation

- Use of ministers' and lay people's time and gifts
- Sharing resources
- Developing an Eco Circuit

Questions discussed

- ***Are we using our people and gifts wisely and sustainably?***
- ***Where are we collaborating well — and where are we duplicating effort?***
- ***How are we caring for creation as part of our discipleship?***
- ***What feels stretched or unsustainable?***

Stewardship conversations reflected both deep gratitude and growing strain. Churches expressed strong appreciation for the commitment of long-standing volunteers, but also concern that too few people are carrying too many responsibilities. Roles are often difficult to fill, workloads feel increasingly unsustainable, and the demands of administration and governance continue to grow, sometimes at the expense of energy for mission and creativity.

There was a shared recognition of duplication across churches—particularly in areas such as finance, safeguarding, and administration—and a desire to explore more collaborative approaches that could ease pressure and make better use of collective resources. At the same time, efforts such as Eco Church initiatives, community gardening, and more sustainable practices were seen as positive signs of care for creation, even as rising energy costs and ageing buildings present ongoing challenges.

Participants also reflected on how people's gifts are identified and used. While many contribute generously through skills ranging from music and worship to practical support and organisation, there is a risk that individuals become over-relied upon or confined to the same roles, leading to fatigue. Attempts to broaden involvement—such as skills audits or resource-sharing initiatives—have had mixed success, highlighting the need for more relational and flexible approaches to encouraging participation.

A key insight was that stewardship is not simply about maintaining systems, but about sustaining people and enabling flourishing. When the patterns of church life consistently feel draining rather than life-giving, this signals the need for change. The emerging challenge is to develop ways of working that are more sustainable, collaborative, and attentive to both the gifts and wellbeing of those who serve, so that the church's life and mission can thrive.

Completion, Not Failure

The afternoon was framed by a theological reflection on completion and change within God's purposes. In creation, life involves growth, fruitfulness and eventual ending — not as failure, but as

part of how God's world works. By contrast, churches often assume that faithfulness requires survival at all costs, treating endings as unfaithfulness rather than truth.

Scripture and history tell a different story. The Church has never remained unchanged: the church of Acts, the medieval church, the Reformation church and the church of today all look markedly different. Throughout history, the Church has repeatedly been reshaped, pruned and re-formed, not because God had abandoned it, but because the Spirit is still at work.

Drawing on Phyllis Tickle's image of an "ecclesial rummage sale", the afternoon invited the Circuit to consider this season as a time of clearing space — letting go of what no longer gives life, honouring what has been faithful, and trusting that nothing offered to God is ever wasted. For some churches, faithfulness in the next season may look like completion rather than continuation, with the fruit of past ministry being offered back to God so that new life may grow elsewhere.

The purpose of the afternoon was therefore not to make decisions, but to tell the story truthfully and courageously, so that future discernment and decision-making can be rooted in faith rather than fear.

Naming What Is Completing

The discussion was deliberately framed as an exercise in discernment rather than judgement. Participants were invited to move away from evaluating success or failure, and instead to recognise honestly where life is ebbing, where faithfulness has been sustained at great cost, and what God may be inviting the Circuit to release with trust.

Rather than working through a single set of questions, tables were guided through three reflective movements, each building on the last. This approach was intended to slow the conversation, allow emotions and insights to surface gradually, and create space for both honesty and hope.

The first movement focused on noticing reality as it is — identifying areas where energy feels depleted, where significant effort yields little fruit, and where structures may be absorbing life that could otherwise be released for mission. The second movement invited participants to consider whether some churches, buildings, or patterns of ministry may be approaching the end of a faithful season, and to explore the possibility of naming such moments not as failures, but as offerings worthy of acknowledgement, gratitude and grief. The third movement then looked forward, asking what new life or possibility might emerge if something were allowed to end well, and what space God might be creating for future growth.

Movement 1: Where is life thinning? (7 minutes)

- Where are we working very hard for very little fruit?
- Where does energy feel drained rather than renewed?
- Where are we sustaining structures rather than releasing people for mission?

Movement 2: What might be coming to completion? (7 minutes)

- Are there churches, buildings, or patterns of ministry that may be nearing the end of their faithful chapter?
- What would it mean to speak of these not as failures, but as offerings?
- What needs to be acknowledged, celebrated, and grieved — rather than quietly propped up?

Movement 3: What would this release make possible? (7 minutes)

- If something were allowed to end well, what could be freed?
People? Money? Imagination? Confidence?
- What might God be clearing space for?

Speaking honestly about churches, buildings, and patterns of ministry that may be nearing the end of their season surfaced a mixture of grief, anxiety, and resistance. These realities are deeply connected to identity, memory, and long-standing faithfulness, and many participants acknowledged how difficult it is to contemplate change when so much has been invested over time. Alongside this, there was recognition of the strain caused by ageing congregations, heavy maintenance demands from older buildings, and too few people carrying multiple responsibilities.

Yet there was also a sense of release in reframing these conversations. Rather than seeing change as failure, participants began to speak of it in terms of offering, transition, and trust in God's ongoing work. This shift in language—towards “switching” or allowing something to rest—was experienced as freeing, creating space to think more creatively about the future. Ideas such as sharing resources, forming larger or more collaborative expressions of church, reimagining buildings as community spaces, or developing more flexible forms of worship (including outdoor or “pop-up” gatherings) began to emerge.

There was an awareness that inherited structures and expectations can no longer always be sustained, and that faithfulness may now require different choices. This includes being realistic about buildings and resources, supporting those who are overburdened, and discerning when to simplify, adapt, or let go. At the same time, participants emphasised the importance of listening carefully—to congregations, to communities, and to God—recognising that one approach will not fit every context.

The emerging insight is that faithfulness is not defined by preserving everything unchanged, but by responding courageously to changing circumstances. Letting go, where necessary, can be an act of trust that opens the way for new, more sustainable and life-giving expressions of church to take root.

What Might Be Waiting to Be Born

Step 1: Imagine beyond existing forms (10 minutes)

- If we were not responsible for preserving inherited structures, what might mission look like in South Bedfordshire five years from now?
- Where might church be happening that looks very different from Sunday worship?
- Who would be leading, that currently has no obvious route into leadership?

Step 2: Identify the courageous move (10 minutes)

- What decision would we need to make soon for this future to be possible?
- What would need to be risked?
- What would need to change at Circuit level — not just locally?

When invited to think beyond existing patterns, there was a noticeable openness across the circuit to new possibilities. Participants spoke about church taking place in a wider range of settings—outdoors, in community spaces, through midweek gatherings, and in flexible or “pop-up” forms.

Digital and hybrid worship were also recognised as important for inclusion, particularly for those unable to attend in person. There was encouragement to ask more intentionally what local communities need and whether traditional patterns, such as Sunday-only worship, remain the most effective way to engage.

There was also a growing appetite for deeper collaboration. This included working more ecumenically at a local level, sharing buildings creatively, and thinking at circuit scale—especially around supporting children and young people. Rather than each church working in isolation, participants suggested focusing resources where there is energy and growth, and exploring more fluid approaches to boundaries, buildings, and ministry. Buildings themselves were increasingly seen not as ends in themselves, but as tools that can be adapted, shared, or, where necessary, released.

At the same time, a note of caution was voiced. Several participants reflected that conversations can easily drift into a “consumer mindset,” focused on attracting people or promoting what the church offers. Instead, there was a deliberate return to a deeper question: what is God calling the Church to be and to do in this time and place? Initiatives such as sharing everyday faith (“This Time Tomorrow”) and creating space to talk about how people live out their discipleship were seen as important ways of grounding this vision.

Overall, the conversation highlighted a willingness to embrace change with openness and imagination, while remaining rooted in discernment. The challenge ahead is to hold this creativity alongside a clear sense of calling, ensuring that new expressions of church emerge not simply from necessity, but from faithful listening and response.

Active Listeners Feedback

Throughout the day, active listeners gathered key themes, insights, and reflections on what God might be saying to the Circuit. Their summary at the close of the day highlighted several important points.

In the morning sessions, there was a strong sense of shared experience. Many churches are actively engaged in their communities and doing similar kinds of work. However, spiritual growth was spoken about less frequently, prompting reflection on how churches might better use their existing resources and step beyond their buildings to build deeper relationships. A key question emerged around how community use of buildings can move from simple room hire to genuine connection and growth in love.

In discussions on nurturing the future and stewardship, there was a mixed picture. Some churches have children and young people, while others do not, raising questions about how best to support and develop younger generations across the circuit. Gifts and resources were valued, but in some places there are gaps in skills or confidence.

By the afternoon, a more challenging reality came into focus. Many congregations are becoming smaller, with limited new people joining. While churches are serving their communities faithfully, this is not always leading to people becoming part of church life. At the same time, there are fewer people to carry responsibilities, buildings are increasingly difficult to maintain, and long-serving volunteers are becoming tired and stretched.

Despite these challenges, there were signs of hope. Participants spoke positively about prayer services, creating space for God to act, and being open to new possibilities. There was a clear sense that churches need to be more inclusive, visible, and outward-facing—having honest conversations both within congregations and with the wider community about needs and expectations. There was also recognition that church life may need to extend beyond Sunday patterns.

Overall, the day revealed a shared desire for growth, alongside uncertainty about how to achieve it. While there is openness to change, it is also recognised that change can feel difficult and unsettling.

Emerging actions and invitations

The Vision Day did not seek to produce fixed decisions, but it did surface a number of shared invitations that point towards the next phase of discernment and action across the Circuit.

For individuals

There is an invitation to pay attention to personal spiritual rhythms and seasons—recognising where life is growing, where responsibilities are being faithfully held, and where something may need to be released. Participants were encouraged to notice honestly what brings energy and what drains it, and to see everyday life—workplaces, neighbourhoods, relationships—as central places of discipleship. Deepening prayer, attentiveness to God, and confidence in speaking about faith in daily life emerged as key areas for growth.

For churches

Churches are invited to create more intentional space for prayer, listening, and discernment, ensuring that activity flows from a rooted spiritual life rather than urgency alone. Alongside this, there is a need for honest reflection on sustainability—of people, buildings, and patterns of ministry—and the courage to adapt where necessary.

A particular opportunity lies in deepening the connection between community engagement and discipleship: moving from providing activities or space towards building relationships that allow faith, belonging, and leadership to grow. Churches are also encouraged to explore more accessible and varied expressions of worship, to listen actively to their communities, and to consider how church life might extend beyond traditional Sunday patterns.

Where fragility is evident—whether in leadership, numbers, or capacity—there is a clear encouragement to seek partnership rather than persevering alone. Collaboration, whether locally or across the circuit, is not a sign of weakness but of shared faithfulness.

For the Circuit

At circuit level, there is a strong invitation to take a wider, more strategic view—particularly in relation to children, young people, and emerging leaders. This includes exploring ways to connect, resource, and support younger generations collectively, rather than leaving individual churches to manage this in isolation.

There is also a need to reduce duplication and release capacity through greater collaboration in areas such as administration, governance, and training. Supporting churches in sustainable use of

buildings, and enabling more flexible and creative approaches to mission and worship, will be an important part of this.

The Circuit is further invited to continue creating space for honest, pastoral conversations about change, including the possibility of completion. Holding this well—with compassion, clarity, and theological confidence—will be essential in the coming years.

A shared direction

Across all levels, the central invitation is the same: to remain attentive to God's call in this season. This includes deepening prayer, strengthening relationships, using resources wisely, and having the courage both to try new things and to let go where needed.

The image of the forest remains a helpful lens—reminding the Circuit to value diversity, honour different seasons, and trust that God is at work in both growth and letting go.

Closing encouragement

The Vision Day did not result in a strategic plan, but it did generate honesty, trust and courage. Participants were reminded that God is already at work within this diverse forest, and that nothing offered faithfully — whether growth, holding or release — is ever wasted. The invitation that remains is not to rush ahead, but to walk faithfully, trusting that God accompanies each step into whatever future is slowly unfolding.

Appendix | Notes from the day

Rooted in Faith

Feedback from table flip chart paper

- Pastoral support. Hampers at Christmas. Keep fit by Judy. Games nights. Walk of faith – ecumenical St Lukes. Shoe boxes. Postcard. Litter picking. More people. Foodbank. Local arrangements – we've got great LAs in our church thanks to Judy and Andrea. Music to support our worship. Prayer services. Young people and their gifts. Children.
- The Olive Tree. Our spiritual growth has increased with young people and students joining our community – taking part in services and prayer meetings and joining our music group.
- Lunch club two Wednesdays a month. Breakfast first Sunday of the month and every second Saturday. Foodbank. Joint services. Coffee chat. Tea and toast. Joining together eg Easter Service and Bible study. Coffee and tea after service chat. What's App chat. Facebook feedback.
- Buildings are often old. Expensive but not used for the right purposes. We spend too much money to maintain it considering the little mission we do.
- Aley Green. Sunday School – children's enthusiasm is encouraging – offering to help with things – must be encouraged. Increase in numbers and children are bringing parents (Parents stay in SS meeting God at their level.) Welcoming, loving, loyal fellowship. Jams / preserves, yard sales, allotments, stalls at village events. Good support from community. Good reputation. Support Foodbanks and numerous charities.
- Oakdale. Youth – attending events, fundraising for activities eg 3Generate, Bible reading in church, volunteering.
- Church – young people taking part in Local Arrangements eg. Leading full service. Adults and youth alternating to operate sound system. Attending Bible study. Fellowship after the service.
- Individual and communal. Fellowship groups. New people from village expansion but lost others. Jamaican's reverence, sing spiritual songs. Signs of people being closer to God – volunteers help.
- Transformation of pastoral care in our church has been positive. Prayer sheet for 3 months widely distributed. Prayer Tent needed or Prayer meetings for listening to God. Develop prayer life of church. Spiritual growth (Priority 1): baptisms, Bible classes, pastoral care transformation, culture of house groups, Café worship, welcoming refugees.
- Toddington. New members bringing energy, ideas, enthusiasm. Encouraging others to join in services who haven't before – music, readings – feel part of church. Helping out whilst Tania off. Bible study included other denominations. Prayer breakfast – new relationships – 3 churches Pentecost Service. Open to change, being more welcoming. Share jobs.
- Trinity. Toddlers and Messy Church. New people, large age ranges, fellowship, sharing tasks and food. Local arrangements developing new people of faith – needs to be built on. Celebration in coffee and cake. House groups need promotion* (* indicates high priority).

Bible study groups on Zoom. Fellowship meeting of leadership team – not just planning*. Silence at beginning of service to collect thoughts*. Range of preachers. Advent Bible study. Events like this! Talking about Trinity, Vision / planning days*. Spiritual growth, rooted in faith.

Feedback from Post it wall

- Aley Green and St John's. Food! Drop in coffee / biscuits. Children – drop in or Sunday School. Bible Studies. Prayer Meetings for listening to God.
- There are hymns and songs which are good to use in services which are not in the hymn books – they are on YouTube.
- A priority needs to be fellowship after church. Donations.
- Spiritual growth – Sunday School increase in numbers and children are bringing their parents. Parents are staying in Sunday School and meeting God at their level.
- Young people. Music group. Bible reading.

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Toddington. Areas of growth – new members joined and having service on village green. Need to pray more deeply about priorities in our church
- HSL. Spiritual growth in young people and their participation. They keep us grounded and move us forward. Music groups playing more and leading worship and people taking LAs. Prayer services every so often sees spiritual growth.
- Strathmore, Farley Hill and High Town. Strathmore hopeful of new members – possibly 4. Patrick led membership. Farley Hill lunch club progressing and more people coming each month, Easter service when all three meet together was good.
- Gravenhurst, Harlington. Not many children coming through but more people coming from housing development. Jamaican lady coming in and widening outlook. We need to listen better. Feel we are too governed by admin rather than listening.

Growing in Love

Feedback from table flip chart paper

- The Olive Tree. Growing in love – engaging with the community. Our church is in a mainly Muslim area. Coffee mornings alternating with Chair aerobics. Messy Church with up to 80 people attending. Hoping to get a grant to increase our involvement with the community.
- Walk of witness. Welcome space. Dementia café. Kingdom Arena use our building. Dil Khush lunch club. Seated exercises. Maidenhall School visits. Foodbank. Asylum seekers.
- Community has changed – many non- Christians in the area ie hence difficulty attracting new people.
- Stuck in the old-fashioned services / worship.
- Breaks / pauses in the services for song, music, silence?
- Interactive eg painting, questions
- Modern versions of the Bible
- Services connected with eh Bible but also contemporary life and problems / politics.

- Aley Green. Willing to let people have a go at leading Local Arrangements / volunteers are forthcoming. Local arrangements allowing for different forms of worship. Prayer breakfast. Ecumenical relationships within village. Churches Together in Caddington and Slip End – very active. Quarterly services, Walk of Witness (Good Friday) World Day of Prayer.
- Oakdale. Foodbank collection. Donating old clothes. Walk of Witness. United Services with Beech Hill. Through volunteering.
- Q3. Fellowship after the service. Fellowship online and face to face. Hosting the Roma Church. Working with Zimbabwe Methodist Fellowship.
- Q4. Limited number of people to do activities / take roles.
- Not really linked to circuit for different reasons. EDI. Number of people. Community presence. Engagement. NPNP. Space for listening – not sure we do that very well. Back (?) other. God – open church. ??takes priority.
- The Living Room (Warm space). Co-op. Noah. Stroke Support. Community support. Festival of Carols. Outdoor presence of volunteers working on garden, building etc. lead to meaningful conversations. Lettings: concerts, Romanian church, joined in Big Clean, Foodbank, engagement over kitchen refurb, door stewards for Sunday worship becoming more diverse. Inclusivity practices need to be more embedded.
- Toddington. Prayer Breakfasts once a month (5 months). Building friendships. Planning a service – open to all – on The Green to be visible. Creative space, Pudding Clubs, Community garden. Working with other groups – Music Makers, dementia care. Advertising events in Parish magazine, notice boards, Facebook. Not enough people to do ‘outreach.’ Fewer people to do jobs.
- Trinity. Churches Together. Toddlers*. (* indicates high priority). Charitable events. Tuesday services*. Participation in local events – May Fair*. Recycling resource cupboard. Constituency action network – links with politicians / elected reps. Decorated Easter cross outside church. Zoom is crossing barriers every Sunday and for Bible study*.
- Stretched – not many youth, young families, middle aged people. Not many other nationalities / ethnic minorities. No joint services with other denominations. Not many links with other churches in the circuit. Relationships with other churches / communities.
- People – not buildings! Community relationships – Tim – outreach projects, coffee cakes. Church relationships – Edlesborough. Roaming – other churches welcomed us, suggested us; stimulated discussions.
- Stretched – emotional rollercoaster, we can’t offer facilities anymore. What is our role now? New place to explore.

Feedback from Post it wall

- Aley Green and St John’s. Loss of key members. Church is available, other congregations worshipping at Church premises. Aley Green – jams etc presence.
- Do we go out and ask the community what they would like? What do they expect from church? Is Sunday the problem? At last we are in a building with lively footfall in front of the door - we need to exploit this.

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Trinity. Most successful are having Tuesday services that bring in people who don't come Sunday, participation in local events and Zoom meeting with other churches. Toddlers Group also brings in young families. What is not working so well is young families, ethnic minorities, joint services with other denominations.
- The Square. Started a Living Room on Friday mornings after Covid and this has grown. Community groups are starting to get involved. Co-op also. Supporting the community and opening up for coffee and soup. We have a little garden and volunteers work in there and talk to people passing.
- Aley Green. Jams and preserves. Yard sales. Allotments. Stalls at village events. Support Foodbanks and other charities. Strong Churches Together in Caddington and Slip End with lots of events.
- Beech Hill. Warm space which has become a welcome space. People coming in just to chat. Dementia café. Lunch club that meets on a Monday. Seated exercises. Bury Park Walk of Witness. Visits from Maidenhall School. Assisted asylum seekers and collecting for Foodbank.
- Eaton Bray. Glade in the forest! Jane - Deacon in training. Tagging onto Tim's project in Houghton Regis. Cakes. Rolling programme of going to other denominations and other places. What is our role now?

Nurturing the Future

Feedback from table flip chart paper

- Music group / Choir. Have young people assisting in roles in the church eg treasurer. Bible readings. Involvement in Biblical drama services. Big commitment taking on roles – don't want to overload. Judy doing Bible study once per month. Look at talents / strengths and train them up as we go along.
- Collaborate well together. Set of mugs to stop using plastic / recycle. Kitchen facilities. Look after grounds.
- Young people leave churches at 18+. Church members middle age +.
- Outreach, mission, community work, testimony. Speak of Jesus openly with no fear. Offer some kind of spiritual input in the outreach activity (lunch club, safe space etc) eg prayer? Understand young peoples language and need – sleep over, Tic Tok
- Aley Green. Ministers time is so stretched. Workload of ministers is unsustainable. When we have ecumenical service we close and have joint worship so releasing the need for a preacher. Have silver Eco award. Sometimes need to think about what we're doing, not just because that's what we've always done. Ageing congregation – all posts filled at the minutes but can see a time this is an issue.
- Oakdale. Q1. Volunteering to take part in services eg. Reading Bible and leading Local Arrangement services. Helping with fund raising ideas. Young people have online meetings to plan and prepare to allocated events / activities. Operating church sound system.

- Q2. Diverse church committee. Encouraging adults and youth to take part. Involving young people from other nearby churches in our services.
- Q3. People can do less time than they used to do because of various reasons.
- People and gift. Collaboration / duplication. Caring for creation what is sustainable.
- S Club, Youth Fellowship and Uniformed services are the foundation. Two young people are starting to help with S Club. Need to use young people more in services. Need to encourage more people in church to encourage young people towards worship leading / local preaching... Encourage more people to understand membership.
- Toddington. Holiday Clubs – younger teens involved. Love drama, music, helping younger children. Pudding Clubs – all ages. Services: all age and involve all ages, crafts, encourage families. Volunteers from groups stepping up to help. Problem: no-one to take on Junior Church or Creche.
- Trinity. Young people in leadership is not really happening as not man in that age group but a few notable exceptions*. (* indicates high priority). Those that do are a bit isolated. How do we identify people? Local arrangements – a lot of people who have been asked say no. People will get involved but not in leadership roles.
- Fragile / under resources: the notable exceptions*. Highly dependent on a few people. Perhaps people are worried of the time commitment. Musicians. Could we sublet to other churches stronger in this area? Nurturing the future*.
- Biker Preacher – other openings? Music – choir / group?

Feedback from Post it wall

- If we want children and young people, we have to make worship more accessible; less liturgy and old language and more modern songs
- Aley Green. Sunday School - by inviting former Sunday School pupils. Boys Brigade – moving on. Local arrangements – encouraging others. Leading LA training. 2 by 2 Club. Online not popular.
- Lawrence. Youth in worship – the most demanding, thought provoking, interesting service I have experienced in the last 4 months was led by Boys Brigade – it was led by young people.
- Look for strengths and train them up as we go along. Collaborate well together.

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Aley Green and St Johns. Aley Green have a Sunday School by inviting all former attendees to bring their children. St John's have a coffee morning with drop in. They also had a Boys Brigade but when numbers dwindled they moved elsewhere. LA encourages other to join in. LA training very important. 2 by 2 club used to happen. DBS, Safeguarding etc face to face preferred.
- Newland. Have Boys Brigade and try to nurture them. Feel fragile as we have no very young people; how do we fill the base of what's to come. We are trying to encourage more to lead worship in general.
- Olive Tree. Lots of community links; coffee morning, Armchair aerobics. A few children in Sunday School. It is difficult to get people to volunteer to become leaders – some are 80 or even 90! How do we get people involved. Some students coming in.

- The missing generation (50s-ish) needs nurturing to then be able to nurture the young and build them up.
- HSL. Have a music group that the young people are involved in. Also have a gospel choir that involves a lot of young people. The treasurer has an assistant who is a young person. Bible readings use the young people. Biblical drama using young people too.
- Trinity. Had a few notable exceptions to young people in leadership. Could we twin? Mentor? Work in other churches.
- Oakland. Take part in services, use the sound systems. Encourage to take part.
- Ros. If we want to encourage young people we need to move into the 21st century. More a mix of worship songs. Update styles of worship. Involve them in the service. Be flexible about how long the service might need to be.

Stewarding God's Gifts

Feedback from table flip chart paper

- A worship committee to review services, worship, style, structure with imagination / creativity. Visual objects, modern language (common) without losing spirituality. To know the subject of the service IN ADVANCE (set theme) Challenge the congregation (interactive). Bring excitement about Jesus. Accept the changes. Be openminded. Read the Bible to the present time. Push down stereotypes as Jesus did. Welcome LGBTQ+. Talk about ethics – abortion, contraception, euthanasia.
- Oakdale. Q1. Celebrate birthdays together. Post service refreshments. Volunteer cleaning the church.
- Q2. Giving everyone opportunities to participate in services. Duplication.
- Q3. Putting planters – greenery patch outside the church. Recycling.
- Q4. Role filling is stretched.
- How engaged are we? Room hire – growing in love. Children and young people. Leaflet new houses.
- Current model for volunteers unsustainable. Need to address financial / transport / inclusivity issues.
- Toddington. Music, drama, Admin, Pudding Clubs, cooking, crafts. Trouble is lack of people / doing too much. Trying to work with other churches / volunteers to spread the load. Creation. Community garden. Organic – everything donated. Changing worship styles to save energy eg. Zoom, use Hall, Garden worship. Eco products for cleaning. Old building; damp, no double glazing, lack of money.
- Trinity. Some people overused. Skills audit has been unsuccessful. Need to know each other better to assess potential as well as abilities. Transferable skills. Using people in their area of strength all the time can be draining for them. Eco church status. Craft – people making things for others; Craftism group. Duplication of effort in administrative procedures / bureaucracy. Some decision making needs to be delegated to churches. Congregation is a gift – but money also helps. Use of building by other groups makes it sustainable.
- Eaton Bray Good Neighbours. Eco church at Edlesborough,.

Feedback from Post it wall

- Aley Green and St Johns's. Reading, music, organisational, financial skills and support, IT skills. Allotment digging, cooking and preparation.
- Stronger together – all churches joining as one.

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Trinity. Congregation is a gift but money helps. Some people are overused. Did a skills audit which was not particularly successful. Eco Church status. Congregation getting smaller and bureaucracy getting larger! This is an issue!
- Harlington. Eco Church. Difficult to look at collaboration when it's a village church. People and gifts – how can you pass on skills? This especially is tricky.
- The Square. Attempt to put together a workshop to share resources re jobs / skills. There were no takers though. This may need to be revisited.
- Olive Tree. Building well maintained, worship environment comfortable. The elderly are becoming tired – one lady has retired three times!!
- Aley Green and St John's. Skills reading, music, organisation and financial. IT. Allotment, digging and preparation. God puts us where he wants us to be. When someone key dies or moves on the rest need help and support.
- Strathmore. Eco Church. Took on Ecotricity as provider and they have been good but their prices are going up 30-40%. Any other treasurers have any info on this.
- Seungwook. Every church can work with spiritual growth. If your job wears you down – this needs thinking about and addressing.
- The stuff we would love to be doing is often not the stuff that we can give the time to.

Naming what is completing

Feedback from table flip chart paper

- Prejudice. Over worked people released. Broader involvement. Encouragement. Confidence building. Better listening. Having advocates. Support with transport – especially for the young. Broader range of music. Broader range of people organising services. Use of internet for music resources.
- Working hard for little fruit. Structure – need more committees, participants and stewards. Demographics – not enough people to do all the jobs (health, age, mobility issues) Work with what we have but people need to step up so some are not left with too much. Need more paid staff and younger people. Same people being used to prepare worship especially for small congregations. Timing – if preacher is late stewards should be able to lead service. Dual roles – Safeguarding Office could be Steward.
- Coming to completion. Old buildings take a lot to maintain. Forcing faith journeys instead, allowing people to be themselves as God intended, with guidance. Some things that 'have been' have started again 'fallow period.' Some musical instruments especially church organs. Single use premises. Make churches into community spaces eg. Music, exercise, wellness, youth clubs, families.

- Old inherited structures can be demanding – a lot of upkeep / repairs needed. Alternatives: Pop up churches, gardens, interest groups, places where people gather, meeting outdoors, cafes, bars, cinemas, new foundation for church. Mental health – talk about problems then deal with them. Sports groups.
- What decisions do we need to make soon? Realistic approach to building management – look at materials used. A church that people can reach easily. Outreach / peripatetic worship. ‘Pop up’ churches. Reassessment of boundaries: fluidity eg Toddington / Flitwick. New technology especially re heating on timing system. Who needs to step forward and who needs to be rested?

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Thinning – so many churches but few ministers. So churches only have communion once a month. To form bigger churches would release ministers and others.
- Are we a church for a locality or denomination. If there is not a church at the centre of a locality, it is difficult to get people to be involved. By working together in villages it is often the other churches that are more important than other Methodists. LEP works best when it is the members who do it as they are there all the time.
- Helpful to have the switch in language - it is good to think of switching rather than finishing – it is freeing.
- Churches coming together might work but what happens in the villages where there are no other churches. Locality might make joining together difficult. One size does not fit all!!
- Worship can be boring – which is why kids don’t sit through it. We’ve got to make worship exciting and vibrant.
- HOWEVER, we can’t assume what young people want. Some young people like what we do – again one size does not fit all! At Oakdale they are asked what they want.

- Taize style worship is so far removed from life it is good.
- The needs of the congregation must be met. The preacher needs to provide what the congregation want. In the Methodist system this is sometimes hard.

What might be waiting to be born?

Feedback from verbal table sharing round the room

- Worship committee to look at worship style etc. Accept changes with an open mind. Question the stereotypes. Talk about Jesus.
- A realistic approach to building management. A church people can reach easily. Pop up churches. Accessible churches. Fluidity of circuit boundaries. New technology eg heating system. 2 purpose built Eco churches.
- Build on the young people we have – take an overview of young people in the circuit and put the resource where the young people are.
- Online services – this might help those who cannot get to church. Having some of these mid-week also. Ask the community what they would like. Does it have to be on Sunday?
- Churches should think about coming together and some building needs to be sold.
- Risk attachment to buildings – let go and let God!
- Can we let out some of our buildings to other churches who are cash rich (Harlington) The buildings can be used in other ways.
- We are talking like a consumer organisation – how to attract people, ‘sell our wares’ etc. Include how congregation are trying to live out their lives.
- TTT – This time tomorrow. An opportunity to find out what people are doing.