

CIRCUITS WORKING IN FEDERATION

A Report

for

The Southampton District

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The **Methodist** Church 
Southampton District

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Contents

Contents	i
Preface	iii
1 Introduction	1
2 The Evolving Circuit System	2
3 Federation of Circuits	6
4 Structural & Missional	14
5 Agreeing how to work	17
6 The Superintendent	20
7 Worship and Pastoral matters	24
8 Hypothetical visions of a Federation model	26
9 Summary	28
10 Appendix A	30
11 Appendix B The Fourward Circuit Group	32
12 Appendix C Federation of Cleveland & Danby Circuits	38
13 Appendix D Acknowledgements	39
Full Contents	40

Preface

This report is the result of research, observation, consultation and creative thinking, over a period of nine months. As the ideas were developed, the paper was circulated to enable others to add to the debate with their ideas and experience; it has also been the basis of some consultation exercises. I have tried to incorporate as much of this additional feedback as possible.

I have limited this report to those areas of Church life and structure that are directly connected to the principal of Federation; however the general debate has frequently wandered into other areas. There is a sense that discussing this subject has provoked new thinking in other areas, with which there is no recognisable “cause and effect” relationship with Federations. With this in mind, I have, for example, included sections on the changing role of the Superintendent, but omitted discussions on alternative models of ordained ministry.

Ideas and comments are included in the paper to help develop the understanding of the concepts, and are not rule, policy or intention, and some are almost certainly wrong! While much collective wisdom has been tapped, ultimately the final arbiter has to be the author, and I take full responsibility for any issues that may arise.

Many people have contributed to this work, formally and informally: most are credited in the appendix. I would like to express my appreciation to them, and also to those whose shorter and simpler ideas have made such a significant contribution.

You are welcome to use some or all of this paper in discussions, and to duplicate freely. I would greatly appreciate knowing how this paper has contributed to your local development.

Matthew Reed

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1 Introduction

Circuits have been working in cooperation with each other within The Methodist Church for many years. Many of these arrangements have been temporary or casual, while some have been long standing and significant in the lives of the Circuits; some have chosen to refer to themselves as Federations, while others have used alternative terms.

In the last two years, largely inspired by the “Mapping a way forward, regrouping for mission” process, there has been increasing interest in alternative models of Circuit structure that will respect the local nature of the existing system, while enabling the Church, local and national, to respond to the challenges of changing times.

It has quickly become apparent that, despite the existence of many such groupings, there was no serious work on the implications of the principle of Federation, especially in a way that could provide a starting point for new developments. This report tries to pull together some existing experience of federative structures, together with some of the alternatives, in order to identify the key advantages and draw backs of this way of working.

2 The Evolving Circuit System

2.1 Changing Circuit Structure

Extracts from Called to Love and Praise, The Missional Nature of the Circuit, and Mapping a way forward: regrouping for mission, CPD.

The local church has the task of sharing in the whole ministry of Christ both in its neighbourhood through worship, fellowship, pastoral care, mission and service, and also in the wider world by its prayers, gifts and outreach.¹

The more local the opportunity, the more local the jurisdiction which applies to it.²

The grouping of local churches in Circuits reflects the Methodist belief that no local church is an autonomous unit complete in itself. Rather, it is linked essentially and structurally to the wider Church. Circuit structures represent interdependence, relatedness, mutual responsibility and submission to mutual jurisdiction. Indeed, the Circuit, rather than the local church, has been the primary church unit in British Methodism.³

The Holy Spirit leads the Church to adapt its structures as it faces new situations and challenges.⁴

In effect what we should be looking for is not simply fewer and larger Circuits, but *'fresh expressions of Circuit'*.⁵

The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for the purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.⁶

The connexional principle represents "interdependence, relatedness, mutual responsibility and submission to mutual jurisdiction."⁷

Circuits are to be open "to the energy of the Spirit" and "their development is limited only by their ability to respond to God's call to engage in mission and ministry for God's kingdom".⁸

2.2 The Circuit system in crisis?

In the light of the many pressures felt by the Church, nationally and locally, there is an acceptance that the existing Circuit structure is no longer viable or relevant.

In many cases Circuits are based on social or geographical situations that are no longer relevant, while in others they have simply become too small to achieve their purpose.

It is important to recognise that some Circuits are working well and do not need to consider any change in their own structure.

Some Circuits may be successful and viable in themselves, but need to consider the wider needs of the Church, especially if neighbouring Circuits are not in a strong position. It is very hard for a Circuit to consider how much of its existing working practice should be changed to meet the needs of neighbouring Circuits or the wider Church.

The “Mapping a way forward, regrouping for mission” process asks all in the Church to look afresh at the existing system, questioning if it is still fit for purpose and looking for better ways of working that are more productive.

Single and dual station Circuits will probably be phased out, except in exceptional circumstances.⁹

2.3 Resources and Staff Shortages

It is widely known that the Methodist Church, in common with most denominations, will not have the number of ministers it needs to continue with its current working practice. It follows that there is an imperative to use our ordained staff as effectively as possible.

The shortage of Superintendents is even more significant (cf Section 7).

Many Circuits are finding it increasingly difficult to find skilled volunteers for the lay roles required by CPD¹⁰. Increasing complexity in many areas has led to a need for people with significant skill sets, while an emphasis on regulation and accountability has discouraged many volunteers.

Some Circuits are experiencing severe financial difficulties, while other Circuits have considerable potential for investment in new work. Similarly, some Circuits have excellent buildings to work with, while others are struggling with ageing buildings that are expensive to maintain, and are frequently in the wrong place.

When exploring the effectiveness of a Circuit structure, it is important that we consider these shortages: could we work more effectively by utilising a resource, human, monetary or physical, in a different way?

While the shortage of resources of all kinds is a major issue, it should not be the primary motivator for change. The key questions should be based around a wider understanding of ourselves as custodians of the Church as an expression of God's mission. We are familiar with the concept of "Value for money" but are we getting "Value for Spirit?"

2.4 Super Circuits

"Mapping a Way Forward" expresses the "need explicitly and firmly to focus on the number of Circuits that are appropriate for effective mission strategies in today's world"¹¹ and later emphasises that "a smaller number of Circuits means larger Circuits"¹².

In some areas, the question has been addressed by merging Circuits to form exceptionally large Circuits. This has been a largely strategic and arbitrary process: the benefits and costs of this approach are not yet clear.

2.5 Organic Change

The Southampton District, like many others, has a bottom-up approach to development. Termed "Organic", our approach is to encourage natural change to emerge according to need. This approach is leading to an exploration of new ways of being Circuits together, with the emphasis on "effective" and "appropriate" rather than organizational size.

The expectation is that Circuits, aware of the pressures affecting them, will explore ways of working that grow out of skills and needs in their area. It was inevitable that some "fresh expressions" of Circuit would emerge, as an alternative to larger Circuits which are widely seen (perhaps unfairly) as imposed administrative structures.

2.6 Subsidiarity

2.6.1 Definition

Subsidiarity is an organising principle stating that matters should be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that "a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level."

The core value in Subsidiarity is that the group structure, the Federation in this case, should be considered subservient to the constituent bodies, the Circuits.

"The principle of subsidiarity goes back to the Bishop of Mainz, Emmanuel von Ketteler. His work shaped the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* and

holds that government should undertake only those initiatives which exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting independently.”¹³

2.6.2 Implications

Decisions need to be taken as locally as possible, commensurate with having the power to make that decision work.

Clause one of the above could be a “given” of our church, while clause two is the practical caution behind this. It is essential in Subsidiarity that both clauses are respected.

By implication, Circuits moving towards Federation or merger are feeling (or understanding) that they no longer have the power to realise their decisions on their own because:

- they do not have enough resources.
- they feel called to operate in a wider area.
- they recognise that they may not be the most effective group to carry out their vision.

¹ Called to Love and Praise 4.7.3

² Called to Love and Praise 4.7.3

³ Called to Love and Praise 4.7.4

⁴ Called to Love and Praise 4.7.11

⁵ Mapping a way forward 6.4

⁶ CPD 500 (1)

⁷ The Missional Nature of the Circuit, paraphrasing Called to Love and Praise

⁸ The Missional Nature of the Circuit 5.6

⁹ Stationing Review Group Report to Conference 2008, Recommendation 21

¹⁰ Constitutional Practice and Discipline of The Methodist Church, especially Vol 2, published annually.

¹¹ Mapping a way forward 6.3

¹² Mapping a way forward 6.4

¹³ Wikipedia “Subsidiarity”

3 Federation of Circuits

3.1 Key Concepts

A Federation is a group of two or more Circuits working together to gain mutual benefit through the sharing of expertise, staff, volunteers or resources across a larger structure, while retaining autonomy in some or all areas.

Each Federation must develop their own way of working, according to the needs of the constituent members. They should choose, or develop, a gradual understanding of those areas of common interest and need that can benefit from sharing. There is no need for a Federation to be formed according to a predefined structure, or for it to conform to a district or national pattern.

While mainly concerned with geographical areas, a Federation may involve other forms of grouping such as islands, city centre mission or a theological position. It may be possible to belong to more than one Federation, although it is probably impractical to belong to more than one Geographical Federation.

3.2 Precedents

The Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25: 14 – 30. We have responsibility, in faith, to make the most of what we have. It is appropriate to question those things which we are doing as individual Circuits to see if we could be doing them better, or sharing better with others, or doing them on larger scale.

Circuits are an expression of Connexionalism. This recognition of connectiveness through mutuality is fundamental to our Methodist identity. Federations are a natural expression of our Connexional heritage.

Circuits are an expression of the body of Christ, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 31, both as parts of the body, and of the joints that hold the parts together.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had,” Acts 4: 32.

There has been successful work across Circuit boundaries for many years. Federations as defined in this report have been formed in many areas, although most have not used the specific term.

3.3 Why form a Federation?

3.3.1 Who could benefit?

In the current climate, with Circuit size a focus of thought, Federation could be an option:

- Where Circuits are small because their focus community is distinctive from those around.
- Where small Circuits have cultural, social or historical issues that are awkward.
- Where Circuits are small enough to gain from shared experience and expertise.
- Where Circuits are having problems recruiting appropriate core staff.
- Where Circuits are spending too much time on structural matters, to the point of impacting their mission (cf. Section 4).
- Where Circuits share common mission objectives.
- Where population growth or movement has blurred the existing Circuit boundaries.

3.3.2 Advantages of Federation for Mission

Many people feel that small Circuits lack the flexibility to get full value out of their resources. Larger Circuits are better able to focus their strengths where needed, while being able to cope with weaknesses, but at the risk of compromising the local nature of their mission. Federation may enable the strengths of this system to be valued and exploited, while avoiding the pitfalls.

It is very hard for someone to evaluate Missional activity when they are directly involved themselves, yet an outsider lacks an understanding of the context. A Federation type structure may be an ideal forum for identifying, developing and planning Missional activities, whether fresh or well established. It will also provide a forum for understanding the widest context, such as national priorities and support structures.

Sharing of resources of all kinds enables big events to be considered. Many Circuits and churches have focussed their mission on a particular day and place, notably at Pentecost. The impact of events like this may be directly linked to the size of the event.

3.3.3 Advantages of Federation for governance and organisation

Many Circuits struggle to find the required Circuit Officers, while the constant raising of standards and the need for specialist knowledge give some roles a more specific skills base: this is especially obvious in finance posts. Larger groupings find it

significantly easier to recruit volunteers with the right ability and commitment. This is partly because they have a larger constituency to draw on, but probably more likely to the value that can be seen in such a role, for a significant time commitment. In most cases, the amount of administration required is not proportional to the size of the area covered, and significant time savings can be made with larger units.

3.3.4 Advantages of Federation for staffing and stationing

Small Circuits find it hard to recruit Lay Employees with the required skills for part time jobs with few hours. Larger units can offer significant part-time hours, or even full-time posts. Equally many Circuits find themselves unable to sustain an additional minister, but feel the need for a half-time post; working across a Federation makes it possible and natural to share ministers between Circuits.

Ordained staff have complex systems of appointment but, generally, larger Circuits are seen as significantly more attractive callings. Federations may offer the same opportunities, without the more daunting aspects of large Circuits. This is especially true of ministers with a distinctive calling, where a small Circuit are unlikely to give them opportunities to develop their own style of ministry, when faced with routine Circuit life.

Many ordained staff have a spouse who is also engaged in church work, whether lay or ordained. This increasing trend puts pressure on the system to find two compatible posts. Federations are especially good situations for such joint appointments to be developed.

Recruiting Superintendents is especially difficult, and may become critical in the next three years. Federations may reduce the number of Superintendents needed, offer a more attractive position, or enable a Circuit to manage without a Superintendent for a short period of time. Also cf. Section 6.

Staff development and support are better enabled within a larger staff grouping. For example, Presbyters can benefit from the mutual peer support of a range of colleagues who understand their situation.

3.3.5 Advantages of Federations for finance and resources

Some Circuits are sharing their CAF already, recognising shared Mission, but without a central agreement. Others are very possessive of their funds and feel they should be ring-fenced, even after a full merger.

There is an inherent responsibility in Connexionalism to use our collective resources to the best of our ability. All Circuits should consider to what degree their resources, financial, human and other, should be held in common and shared accordingly.

3.4 Why not merge?

If working together on larger scale brings benefits, why not simply merge into a single larger Circuit. The Circuit, as the missionary unit, has always also been the administrative unit, and it has been argued that a full merger is more “honest” since it recognises this.

In some situations, there has been a fear that a Federation could be a “backdoor” merger, with a full coming together following in a few years. Conversely, some Circuits have considered Federations specifically because it offers a way of sensibly managing a merger which they see as inevitable in the long term.

Most of the advantages of being in a bigger Circuit are the same as those for a Federation. It could be argued that, in practice, a large Circuit working in sections is indistinguishable from a typical Federation.

The process of building and governing a Federation are quite different. Individual Circuits “own” the Federation and are genuinely in control. Any decision making powers that are *delegated* to a Federation are ultimately at the gift of the individual Circuit meeting. Decision making in a single large Circuit is at the gift of the single Circuit Meeting, which may delegate to a section meeting, or other such group: the smaller unit will not have any authority in its own right. This is a very important difference when building the relationships: the loss of self-determination and authority is a key factor for many in discussions prior to Circuit mergers, and often defeats the process.

Federations recognise the autonomy of individual Circuits, which enables them collectively to decide what aspects of their work and mission should be collaborative, and which should remain independent. Large Circuits, by definition, start from a position of total unity.

The Circuit, as the unit of mission, should be able to relate specifically to the area of its community. Where Communities are small but distinctive, they need to identify closely within themselves; larger Circuits do not enable this, and may hinder.

3.5 Soft and Hard Federations

It has been recognised already that a Federation should involve sharing those areas of work that can lead to mutual benefit, but there is no need to share everything: each Federation should develop its own way of working.

There is a whole range of degrees of collaboration from mutual support through to joint decision making. For convenience, the terms “Soft” and “Hard” have been adopted to describe the degree of collaborative working and formality existing within a Federation. These are not intended to show preference, nor to define

limits, but to allow comparison between different models of Federation and to show trends over time.

A Soft Federation is where the joint working is more casual, intermittent, temporary, or restricted, while a Hard Federation has more commitment, permanence and authority.

A Federation that jointly employs an administrator is naturally harder than one that does not. A Federation that is formed as part of gradual merger process could be described as getting progressively harder.

All Federation models are somewhere on the wide scale between Soft and Hard. There is no need to define a boundary, or mark the point at which a Federation becomes hard, although it may be useful to consider the point at which some decision making powers become delegated to the Federation as the water-shed.

Most Federations are likely to evolve over time. It is important to note that this can be a move in either direction: there is no expectation that Federations will always gradually become harder, some will always become softer. It is probable that most will be harder for a time, then softer for a period, following their own priorities and needs.

3.6 Subsidiarity in Federations

In principal, Subsidiarity is a core element of a federative structure. A Federation is always subsidiary to the constituent Circuits, and this is the most distinctive difference between a Federation and a larger merged Circuit .

The autonomy of the constituent Circuits ensures that decisions are made at the lowest practical level, yet there is a forum for considering the wider implications. More importantly, it provides a greater potential for skills and resources to be made available to enact a decision taken.

Where Mission is the focus, it is essential that the core vision is held by those who are most clearly linked to the potential work area, however this is defined. A Federation could enable this to succeed where the work being considered does not fit within existing boundaries, such as a new housing estate that bridges Circuits. At the same time it gives greater opportunity for a vision to be resourced appropriately.

While it is possible for a Large Circuit to delegate responsibility to a Section, or group of churches, the ultimate authority remains with the Circuit. In a parallel federative structure, the individual Circuit always retains the ultimate authority, although it may choose to delegate some powers to the Federation.

3.7 Sample models of working collaboratively between Circuits:

Type	Example
Independent Circuit	No cooperation
Mutual Support	Ministers meet for lunch.
Cooperation	LPs train together.
Federation (soft)	One Federation Meeting is held together each year, consisting of all the Circuit Meeting members. The CLT's meet together every three months. All training is organised jointly, there is a joint mission event each year, and some small churches combine across Circuit boundaries for occasional services
Federation (hard)	All Circuit Meetings are held jointly: for the first part of the evening, splitting into constituents for the later part. The Federation employs a full-time administrator, whose work is shared between the Circuits. One minister, with a specific gift, works across the whole Federation leading worship for young adults. There is a single combined plan for all the Circuits.
Merger	All aspects are one.

3.8 Terminology and Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, a fixed set of terms has been arrived at to enable comparisons and accurate descriptions. The definitions of these are given below, which also help in understanding the issues behind the terms.

It is not expected that individual Federations will feel bound to use these terms, but will use other phrases that describe their own nature and identity: one of the best known established Federations terms itself the “Fourward Group”.

The word “Federation” has a poor press. While its meaning is precise and appropriate to this context, it has negative associations arising from its use elsewhere. Some of the other terms defined below may not be suited to actual situations, through association or unfamiliarity.

Definitions of Key Terms

3.8.1 Federation

A structure in which two or more Circuits agree to work together sharing in one form or another. Together they form a single entity, but recognising the autonomy of the constituents

3.8.2 Compact

One of many names given to the formal agreement that would underpin the Federation structure, whether formal or informal.

The term “compact” has been chosen to avoid the term “covenant” which, while accurate, has other uses within Methodism, and might confuse things in areas where LEP’s are involved.

3.8.3 Soft (Federation)

Where Circuits have agreed to share in aspects of work but without committing to share in formal decision making, or delegating powers or permanent structures. Collaboration may be seen as short term.

3.8.4 Hard (Federation)

Where Circuits have agreed to joint decision making or formal delegation of responsibility to a joint body, or the establishment of permanent structures. Collaboration is probably seen as long term.

3.8.5 Geographic (Federation)

A Circuit grouping formed from neighbouring Circuits, covering an identifiable area on a map.

3.8.6 Interest (Federation)

A Circuit grouping formed from Circuits that share a common mission focus or speciality, such as rural mission, business mission or prison chaplaincy.

3.8.7 Mission

For the purposes of this paper I am defining Mission as those activities that we do which contribute to the building of the Kingdom. This can be further defined by using the Our Calling statements and the priorities of the Methodist Church.

3.8.8 Merger

Used to describe the coming together of two or more Circuits into a single Circuit. Many Circuits have specifically chosen not to use this phrase to describe the process, showing the potential sensitivity of this measure.

4 Structural & Missional

Everything we do as The Methodist Church should be focussed on mission. All the change that we are facing at present is, arguably, driven by a need to maximise our Mission in whatever context it is expressed. We are mapping a way forward, *in order to* regroup for mission.

It is clear, however, that significant amounts of the activities of the Church are only indirectly Missional. It can be helpful, therefore, to divide our activities into those which are directly Missional and those which are indirectly Missional, the latter I have termed “Structural”.

4.1 What is meant by Mission?

It is not appropriate to offer a full thesis on the meaning of the word Mission to the Methodist Church in this paper; however the concept underpins so much of what we do that it can not be ignored.

Mission is everything we do that (directly) builds the Kingdom.

“Mission is the totality of God’s activity to restore his order (Kingdom) to the whole of his creation”¹⁴

“Mission is a multi-faceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church, planting, contextualisation and much more.”¹⁵

"It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."¹⁶

The Methodist Church has chosen to express its role in the Missio Dei through “Our Calling”:

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through **Worship, Learning & Caring, Service and Evangelism.**¹⁷

The Missio Dei that is at the centre of our work is expressed through our people, our ministers, our churches and the national Church, but traditionally it is through the Circuits that it is mostly clearly explored, identified, expressed and resourced. As the nature, size and structure of our Circuits are questioned, it is essential that we focus first on the benefits to our Mission (or to Missio Dei).

4.2 What is meant by Structural?

Much of the activity of the church revolves around things which are only indirectly related to Mission. Most obvious of these are the various assortments of finance officers that are necessary at every level of the Church: the acquisition, possession, administration and distribution of money is clearly not an essential Missional activity, but without it we would not be able to pay for our Ministers, Lay Employees, Buildings or any of the other expressions of Mission that may be needed.

It could be argued that the Church should not be involved with anything that is not directly or indirectly linked to Mission.

Most Structural things have a Missional element, while most Missional things have a structural element. There are few activities that are wholly Structural or wholly Missional.

4.3 Implications of Missional and Structural Activity

Worship is Missional. Administration is Structural.

Missional activity needs to be decided where people are in touch with the context, normally this means within the community being served.

Structural activity needs to be done where it most efficient.

Structural things tend to be controlled by rules, Standing Orders, laws and conventions, while Missional things *should* be led by the Spirit.

Structural things, such as a Manse or Lay Employees pay, enable mission to take place, and are not devoid of influence. The difference may be that these things should never dictate policy, but respond to it. Arguably, it could be said that that Policy is the written expression of Mission, to provide a framework for Structural activity.

The only thing that matters is mission. It is imperative not to let Structural elements control or limit Missional elements. Structural things should be changed or adapted to enable Missional things.

4.4 Structural & Missional in a Federation

The only reason for changing anything is to improve or protect the mission of the individual church, the Circuit and the Methodist Church nationally.

There is clear evidence to suggest that sharing of Structural activity and obligations in a larger unit, such as a Federation, brings benefits through efficiency and economy. It follows that a Federation that is united for Structural elements, but

autonomous for Missional activity would be significantly more effective than completely independent Circuits.

If mission is not better enabled, then it should not be done.

If there is a short term cost, whether financial or personal, it should be weighed against the long term gains in mission.

Experience in existing large Circuits shows that Structural elements are better organised in large units, but there is a strong feeling that large Circuits may lose the sense of mission, which is seen as a local issue.

It is possible that the aspect that defines a relationship as a Federation rather than a merger of Circuits is that, in the main Structural elements are shared, while Missional elements are kept autonomous.

An individual Circuit may wish to retain its autonomy because it sees itself as having a distinctive and unified vision of its Mission. However, a Federation may be an appropriate forum for Circuits to jointly develop their understanding of their own calling, and may also enable resources to be made available for an individual Circuit activity, that they would not be able to achieve on their own.

¹⁴ Fresh Expressions, Mission Shaped Ministry Course, Evangelism Strategies Part One, p.8

¹⁵ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. (Orbis Books 200), p. 512

¹⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, London: SCM Press, 1977

¹⁷ Our Calling

5 Agreeing how to work

There is general agreement that, when a Federation is formed or recognised, there needs to be an agreement made and celebrated – a Compact.

It has been observed that the character of the individual post holders, whether Lay or Ordained has a significant effect on the nature of an emerging Federation. Since personnel will change, it follows that this may be reflected in the relationships within a Federation, and implies that this should be considered when considering planning any long term joint working.

5.1 Compact

A Compact within a Federation is largely formalising the informal; like all constitutional workings the agreement is there to cope with moments of disagreement and division, and to ensure that the constituents are appropriately listened to. It could be a framework for reassurance, rather than restriction. Informal groups will often cite that they have not had problems before, but there is no guarantee that this will remain so.

There are some that argue that all joint working practices across Circuits, formal or informal, should be formalised into a Soft Federation Compact, at the least.

It is preferable for Soft Federations to rely on CPD for its practice where possible.

A Compact that is more like a “statement of intent” may be more appropriate for a Soft Federation. It is possible to agree to run on general Christian principals of Fellowship and Love, rather than on constitutional lines. Issues can be decided by determined consensus rather than majority voting.

A Compact in a Hard Federation should outline the areas of work that are to be shared and the nature of consultation and decision making in those areas. It would be sensible for it also to note the autonomy of the constituents and include provision for reviewing, expanding and ending the Federation.

Some feel that it is important to list the joint activities that have taken place over the year, and include them as an appendix to the Compact, updated each year. Similarly, others believe the Compact should be renewed and celebrated annually.

5.2 CPD implications

CPD may need to be used with imagination (!) where fresh ways of working are being explored. There is nothing in CPD that prevents a Federation from operating: consideration should be given to how certain orders are complied with.

Soft Federations are unlikely to make decisions that will require compliance with CPD, beyond identifying Federation Officers as also their own.

Circuit Meetings¹⁸ have the authority to appoint “additional persons as the Circuit Meeting may desire...to ensure that all areas of the life of the Circuit are adequately represented”¹⁹. This can be used to recognise officers and representatives from across the Federation as common to all constituent Circuit Meetings, allowing a single Federation Meeting to have the authority of the specific Circuit Meeting. Similarly, Standing Orders covering other committees can be used to identify a joint body: the Invitation Committee being the most significant²⁰

Many of the Circuit Officer’s duties involve being “responsible for..” or “ensuring that..” things are done. Taken literally, this shows that they do not have to do the activity themselves, this could be undertaken by a Federation Officer.

Things are more complicated where recorded voting is required. A combined meeting could decide things as a single body, but then take a formal vote, using colour coded voting sheets to enable the individual Circuit wishes to be recorded. Alternatively, the Circuits could meet as one for the main decision, then divide up to complete the discussion and take formal votes, while dealing with more specific local business. Complications in this area should not prevent a Federation being formed.

In some areas it is possible for individual Circuit Meetings to delegate powers to a Federation Meeting that is similarly constituted, but drawing from the whole Federation.

There are many places where it is not clear how to apply CPD in a federative situation. Where this is the case, it is important to have the position clarified at District (or National) level before significant decisions are taken. In time, a body of working practices will build, to clarify things.

There are probably some situations where the wording of CPD will prevent a Federation from working successfully, even if the spirit is adhered to. If Federations become more common, it is possible for Conference to adjust CPD to enable more flexible working, or suspend certain Standing Orders. There is generally a move to simplify CPD and make it more flexible.

Charity law may provide restrictions to the decision making within a federation, requiring individual Circuits to (separately) control their own assets, however this not expected to be an issue with Soft Federations, and the changing relationship between the Methodist Church and the Charity Commission may remove any obstacles.

5.3 Veto?

Where a Hard Federation is considering significant issues, some have suggested that an individual Circuit should have the right of veto.

It is unclear how this could be implemented, and would suggest that the Federation has more complicated issues of trust, governance and operation.

¹⁸ The Circuit Meeting is essentially the body of people, rather than a physical meeting, although they do meet a number of times through the year.

¹⁹ CPD Vol 2, S.O. 510, 1, ix (2008)

²⁰ CPD Vol 2, S.O. 541, 3 (2008)

6 The Superintendent

The nature and role of a Superintendent is critical to the working of any of the Circuit models discussed here.

The skills, experience and character of an individual Superintendent has enormous influence on the working nature of their Circuit. It is inevitable that relationships between Circuits must also reflect those between Superintendents, and the inherent changes that this brings with time.

To a significant extent, it is issues relating to Superintendency that have driven the search for alternative models of Circuit.

6.1 Superintendency Problems

The general shortage of ministers makes for an even more distinctive shortage of Superintendents.

The changing nature of the Superintendency is significant. As the skill set required becomes more distinctive, the number of presbyters who have these skills will be limited.

The number of Ministers offering to become Superintendents is falling.

Some presbyters feel they have been “pressured” into Superintendency, and that they do not have the necessary skill base or calling.

Some Ministers express the belief that they are specifically called to the role of Superintendent.

Some question if we truly and practically recognise Superintendency as a specialised calling. There is general recognition that initial and ongoing training for Superintendents has been poor: this is already being addressed at national level.

For some, *promotion* to Superintendent is seen as a natural part of their career path.

We have church members who view the Superintendent as the oldest, the wisest, the longest serving or the “best” minister in the Circuit. It is common to hear language that reinforces this view, even if unintentional, especially when discussing preaching: in many churches, it is expected that a congregation will be larger when the Superintendent is preaching.

Many Superintendents regret the loss of a significant element of pastoral work in their role, or the time to undertake such work: it is understood that this is a practical reality, rather than an intentional position. For some, this is undermining their

calling as a minister, and may be driving a growing trend for Superintendents to step down from this role.

Superintendents have a significant role as gatekeepers between the Circuit and the wider Church, and as such are a major influence on the character of their circuit and its ability to address identity, change and Connexionalism.

“Superintendents therefore have to be able to exercise their role of *oversight* in general in the form of pastoral responsibility, but also from time to time in three particular facets of *leadership, management* and *governance*. Which of these they are exercising at any one time will depend on the context in which they find themselves.”²¹

For some, the pressures of balancing the various aspects of the role of Superintendent have become too great. Illness, directly or indirectly related to stress and overwork, is a huge concern among our Superintendents; there would appear to be an alarming rise in this, although some argue that this may be the result of greater openness in discussing these issues.

6.2 Fresh Expressions of Superintendency!

Fresh expressions of Circuit probably require a fresh expression of Superintendent.

Do we need Ordained Superintendents? Synod Cymru has now implemented a system of “Lay Superintendents”. While waiting for CPD to catch up with them, they have converted the district into a single Circuit, divided into areas, each with a Lay Supervisor. They argue that this is closer to Wesley’s model, although the shortage of Welsh speaking ministers is the driving issue.

Some Circuits are exploring appointing a Lay Circuit Manager whose job is to do all of the management, administration, oversight and structural leadership that currently lies with the Superintendent, leaving them free to concentrate on pastoral and Missional activities; other denominations have used this model for some time.

Some Circuits are exploring appointing an Assistant Superintendent from among its ordained staff. This would be seen as a training position for a younger minister to develop the skills necessary to be an effective Superintendent in their next post.

New models of Superintendency are being explored, especially through sharing across Circuits or by using a supernumerary. While generally the result of temporary local problems, many of these situations have been very successful. Small Circuits have often found the connectiveness this implies rewarding and, in some cases, has led to merger or Federation talks starting.

6.3 Separated Superintendent

Two models of Superintendent that use the phrase “separated” have become frequently discussed, and in some cases implemented.

6.3.1 Superintendency provided from outside the Circuit

Where a suitable Superintendent can not be provided from within the Circuit staff, for what ever reason, a minister from a neighbouring Circuit is appointed to the role. Where this is a supernumerary, a formal named Superintendent is also necessary for legal purposes; by default, this is the Chair of District.

This model is usually used to cover temporary problems, such as illness, but can also be used creatively.

The Southampton District has used this approach for the Meon Valley Circuit. As a single station Circuit, the District felt it was unlikely that they would attract a Superintendent through Stationing with a suitable theological perspective for their needs. A suitable Presbyter has been appointed, with a Supernumerary providing Superintendency from a neighbouring Circuit.

6.3.2 Superintendent without pastoral charge

In some large Circuits, a Superintendent has been appointed without a church or other specified pastoral responsibility identified. The role is therefore totally focussed on Circuit activity, and has been freed from the administrative and pastoral work load of a congregation.

In many ways, this allows a Superintendent to be a better “Pastor to the Pastors” and could lead to a more effective ministry team.

This could allow space for new and creative expressions of leadership and oversight.

Many Superintendents object to this concept on the grounds that they need to be grounded in their own congregation.

Many people feel that this is the only way for a really large Circuit to operate: the traditional model will be an unrealistic burden on the Superintendent.

Tradition has usually placed the Superintendent in the largest church in a Circuit, but many have found value in placing them in the smallest church, reducing their work load to acceptable levels.

6.4 The Superintendent in a Federation

Any of the above models could enable a single Superintendent to have oversight of several Circuits in a Federation, or for two Superintendents to jointly care for a number of Circuits.

Federations could provide a natural model for sharing Superintendents. This could allow specialism, or facilitate cover for sabbaticals, vacancies and illness.

More small Circuits may have to share Superintendents in the future. Circuits in Federation are probably more likely to be asked to share a Superintendent, since they have established structures, but may be best positioned to capitalise on this. For those who see their Federation as a step toward merger, this is a natural progression, and stationing could set the time scale.

If single station Circuits are to be discontinued in principal, a Federation model could allow individual Circuits to retain their autonomy and identity, while sharing a Superintendent from others in the group.

In summary, a Federation could function equally well with:

- Individual Superintendents for each Circuit.
- A single shared (Separated) Superintendent covering all the Circuits.
- A small team of Superintendents (two or three) with specific division of responsibility on geographic or work emphasis lines.
- A team of a Separated Superintendent, an ordained Assistant Superintendent (in training), and a lay Assistant Superintendent (manager)

The mutual support and practical structures of a Federation are likely to make any of these options more successful. In general, Federation could allow for a more satisfying model of Superintendency by giving more flexibility for the working structure to be designed around the needs of the Circuits and staff, by giving the constituents more control over how their ministry changes over time, and by giving the Circuits, collectively, the ability to cope internally with the inevitable crisis moments.

²¹ What is a Circuit Superintendent?

7 Worship and Pastoral matters

7.1 Worship

Worship is central to our faith.

Worship is recognised as a core element in our Mission.

There is a shared concern that Worship should feature in our understanding of Federations.

The potential for quality in worship provision rises when there is greater potential for ministers and other worship leaders to specialise in a specific style of worship. Churches can ask for regular services in a specific style, Taizé for example, knowing that there are people with skills and experience that can lead them, and worship leaders can develop those skills and experience, according to their calling and interest. This can work equally within a Federation or within a larger Circuit.

Most worshippers are likely to be unaware of changes to the working structure of their Circuit. They will be aware, however, if the quality of worship should improve, even they do not know why this has been made possible.

7.2 The Plan

The Plan is one of the means by which we define Circuits. For many members, it is the only overt existence of the Circuit.

Some Circuits have worked together on a combined plan for many years.

Some large Circuits have divided their plan into sections, using teams of preachers (lay & ordained) to cover a smaller area. This allows preachers to better understand the context of their congregations. Conversely, some Circuits have a policy where all preachers are expected to preach in all churches on a regular basis.

Borrowing of preachers between adjoining Circuits has been standard practice for years, especially where Supernumerary Ministers and Local Preacher distribution is uneven. A Federation could normalise this and allow for a more coordinated approach.

The plan could be worked out at Federation level, but would need to recognise the priorities of the Churches and Circuits.

7.3 Pastoral work

Most pastoral work is carried out at Church level, and is unlikely to be affected by the formation of a Federation although, as with all aspects of Church life, there may be significant advantages through better training, mutual support and sharing resources.

Employing a Pastoral Lay Worker becomes a more viable option in any large structure, such as a Federation or large Circuit.

In some areas it may be possible to coordinate the work of Hospital Chaplains to fit in more closely with a larger federative structure, than is possible with individual Circuits. This may enable a Chaplain, and their work, to be more closely tied into a ministerial team. There are some instances where the coordination of Circuits (and ecumenical links) to provide connections with a Chaplaincy service is functioning as a Soft Federation.

In some areas, student work is hampered by the spread of accommodation across a number of Circuits. This is an obvious situation where a Federation would enable a united and coordinated Mission to be explored, and may enable a Chaplain to function as part of a Federation ministerial team.

8 Hypothetical visions of a Federation model

8.1 A Hard Federation

A Federation Leadership Team contains all Superintendents and Senior Circuit Stewards.

Circuit Ministers work within their own Circuit under their own Superintendent, but the CLT functions for local issues only.

A Federation Staff Meeting includes all Ministers, Lay Employees and significant volunteer post holders. It meets quarterly.

Local Preachers, Finance, Property and minor bodies meetings are held as one. Circuits have their own nominated Treasurers and Property Secretaries for policy decisions, although they work as a team and the same person is the nominated Treasurer in most of the circuits. A Federation employee acts as book-keeper, record keeper and project manager, and works under the direction of the Circuit Officers.

“Federation” meetings take the place of quarterly Circuit meetings, but have time within their structure to allow for individual Circuit groups to meet (usually the first hour of each meeting).

In combined meetings, the common decision is recognised, accepted and owned by all the member Circuits. There is no need for decisions to be ratified by individual Circuit Meetings.

Where there are issues in CPD, a coloured paper vote will be taken to record individual Circuits' votes, although this is limited to stationing matters relating to extensions.

Circuits have the right of Veto - major decisions MUST therefore be notified in advance. This power has never been used.

The Circuit Advance Funds²² are shared between the Federation members.

There is a single Preaching Plan covering the Federation, the individual Superintendents decide on the structure and some Ministers and Lay Preachers work across the whole area, encouraging specialist services for Young People and Young Adults.

A formal Compact is celebrated with a service each year.

8.2 A Soft Federation

The Superintendents meet regularly to coordinate the work of their Circuits.

A single Preachers Meeting includes all those in the Federation, and the plans are coordinated to allow a degree of sharing.

Staff, Preacher and Discipleship training are organised jointly.

There is an annual Mission Event where all efforts from across the Federation are focussed on one town for a week. This rotates around the Circuits.

A Federation meeting takes place twice a year to share issues and concerns. Membership is all the constituent CLTs, but also includes an open invitation to anyone interested. It appoints working parties to develop ideas, but any significant decisions are ratified by individual Circuit Meetings.

A single Treasurer, with assistant, has been recognised by each constituent Circuit as their own Treasurer. He runs separate accounts of each Circuit, but uses a common format and presents them together.

An general Affirmation has been agreed, and celebrated in worship.

²² A fund that provides money for new and creative work, as well as grants for sustaining existing buildings, staff or other activity

9 Summary

9.1 Key Findings

There is strong evidence that Circuit Federations can make a positive contribution to the mission of the Church in many areas of the Connexion.

There is strong interest from many Circuits, especially small Circuits and those who are facing specific challenges.

The potential advantages of larger Circuits are well established, but there are also clearly identifiable weaknesses, especially in the fear they engender among those who value smaller arrangements. A Federation may offer the best of both worlds, by retaining autonomy for individual Circuits, while sharing in the wider benefits of a larger unit.

There is clear evidence to suggest that sharing of Structural activity and obligations in a larger unit, such as a Federation, brings benefits through efficiency and economy. It follows that a Federation that is united for Structural elements, but largely autonomous for Missional activity would be significantly more effective than completely independent Circuits.

There is significant evidence that some elements of Mission are better planned in conjunction with others, in a forum such as provided by a Federation, and other elements may be more effective if delivered from within the strengths of a larger resource base, staff team or volunteer body.

Federations should have a Compact or agreement to define the relationship and working practice.

Informal arrangements for working across boundaries are found throughout the Connexion. Most of these can be recognised technically as Federations, and may benefit from understanding and accepting this status in order to further develop joint work.

Federations do not need to be based around an established model, but should develop their own approach.

Where Circuit mergers seem likely or inevitable, a Federation may provide a sensible way of managing the process, while building joint work and trust.

There are those who feel that all Circuits could benefit from being part of a Federation. This is especially true of large diverse districts such as Southampton, but this is not universally accepted and has not been established as policy in any district.

There is a strong feeling against an additional level of administration between District and Circuit. The principle of Subsidiarity marks the difference between a Federation and a fully merged Circuit.

9.2 The next step

Federation should be an option considered in many situations, with information and advice offered through the District Development Enabler, District Training Officer and others.

Existing groups that function in this way should be encouraged to recognise their status as Federations in order to strengthen and develop their joint work.

Training and resource materials could be produced for use by Circuits exploring working together or wishing to develop an existing relationship further.

It would be helpful for the Southampton District to establish a team to assist Circuits wishing to develop a Federation. There is a strong feeling from the Fourward Group Federation Sub-Group that they would like to be involved in this.

A conference of District Development Enablers could be held to discuss further the implications of this report.

A larger body of evidence from existing Federations could be explored, probably through the national District Development Enablers network.

10 Appendix A

10.1 Some duties of a Superintendent specified in Standing Orders²³

The requirements of Standing Orders have to be borne in mind when considering the theological and practical responsibilities that lay upon Superintendents. The following list is not exhaustive, but sets out some of the major considerations.

10.2 General responsibilities

9.1.1 The Superintendent is required to visit all churches in the Circuit to provide encouragement, challenge and support [S.O.522], and to ensure that weekly staff meetings are convened [S.O.523]. It is her or his duty to keep the Chairman informed about stationing needs in the Circuit [S.O.782(1)].

9.1.2 The Circuit Stewards are responsible, with the Superintendent and staff appointed to the Circuit, for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit, and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting [S.O.531(1)]. It is assumed that the Superintendent will ensure that such decisions do not conflict with the requirements of standing orders.

9.1.3 The Superintendent is responsible, in consultation with colleagues, for making the Circuit Plan [S.O.521]. This ensures that those responsible for leading worship are subject to the discipline of the Church as far as doctrine and training are concerned.

9.1.4 Membership returns must be reported to the Synod Secretary by the Superintendent [S.O.054(12)].

10.3 Chairing Meetings

9.2.1 The Superintendent has the right to chair every official meeting within the Circuit and its local churches. A deputy may be appointed in writing, normally a minister appointed to the Circuit or an adjoining Circuit, to preside over a Circuit Meeting or Church Council [S.O.502]

9.2.2 Lay persons appointed to chair other committees must be approved by the Circuit Meeting or Church Council concerned [S.O.502]

9.2.3 Circuit meetings and committees shall be convened only after consultation with the Superintendent. [S.O.502(5)].

10.4 Candidates and Probationers

9.3.1 The Superintendent is responsible for ascertaining and assuring the Connexion that a candidate for the (presbyteral) ministry or the diaconate assents to the Methodist Church's doctrinal standards, is willing to uphold its discipline and be available for stationing, and, if a candidate for the diaconate, is willing to accept the commitments entailed in becoming a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order. [S.O 710(3) and 711]

9.3.2 The Superintendent is responsible with the Circuit staff and Circuit stewards for ensuring that the required reports about a ministerial or diaconal probationer's progress are submitted. [S.O.725(4)(a)(i) and 725(5)(a)(i)].

10.5 Finance and Property

9.4.1 The Superintendent is responsible for ensuring that all funds in a Circuit and its Local Churches are audited or independently examined, and that reports are made to the Circuit Meeting or the appropriate Church Council [S.O.012(4)].

9.4.2 The Superintendent is responsible for the care and custody of deeds and documents relating to Circuit and local church property. Such deeds and documents are to be inspected annually by the Superintendent and a Circuit steward or other official of the Circuit. [S.O.903(3)].

9.4.3 Manse Inspection Reports must be presented to the Superintendent who is required to make such reports available to be seen by the occupants of the manses concerned [S.O.965].

9.4.4 If permission is granted by the trustees for masonic services to be held on Methodist premises, it must be public worship the contents of which must be seen and approved by the Superintendent, and the worship must be conducted by a person appointed by the Superintendent [S.O.928].

9.4.5 Dramatic licences must be agreed by the Superintendent [S.O.926].

²³ Quoted in "What is a Circuit Superintendent" Report to Conference 2005

11 Appendix B

The Fourward Circuit Group

The Fourward Circuit Group has been functioning for some time as a Federation, although they have not used this terminology. A Sub-Group was recently formed to study how they functioned as a Federation, and how this could be developed further.

The constituents are Andover, Reading & Silchester, Newbury & Hungerford and Basingstoke.

Report of the Federation Sub-Group Fourward Circuit Group June 2009

At the Fourward Meeting on October 2008 a sub-group of the meeting was tasked with discussing the idea of Federation as a possible model for the Fourward Group.

Discussions following that meeting defined the role as exploring the concept of Circuits working in Federation in general terms, and as might be applied to the Fourward Group. Through this it would be participating in the wider consultation and research into this concept, and developing possible models.

Feedback will be through a report presented to the Fourward Group Meeting, and through the papers being prepared by Matthew Reed for presentation to the DDE national team and the Southampton DPE.

The outcome of the work of the group can be defined in four areas:

1. Observations on Federations in general.
2. Observations on the Fourward Group as currently working.
3. Recommendations to the Fourward Group meeting.
4. Possible wording for a Compact (or agreement).

Please Note

The while some in the Sub-Group had some reservations as to whether they have a remit to make recommendations, it was agreed that this was the appropriate response to our brief.

11.1 Observations on Federations in general

Federations are an expression of Connexionalism that recognises the conflicting needs of the Church in the 21st Century.

The concept of Federations is new to Methodism and is still developing, but may be recognising an existing working practice in a new way.

The terminology used is accurate, but may not be helpful through association with other usages. It is expected that a group of Circuits working in this way will use their own descriptor.

The term Federations in this context refers to a group of Circuits deciding to work together for mutual or individual benefit. It specifically recognises the autonomy of individual Circuits, while working as a collective in some way.

Federations may range from loose cooperation, for example sharing the training of LP's, to formal agreements to share staff, meetings and decisions: these are framed Soft and Hard Federations, recognising that the real situation could be anything between the extremes.

Soft Federations are likely to change their nature over time, according to the needs and wishes of the Circuits involved. Hard Federations are more likely to have their remit established and defined through constitution or agreement.

Federations may be formed in order to graduate towards a full merger, but this is not inherent. It has become recognised that this is a strong methodology to support a process of merger that has been identified as, or decided to be, inevitable.

While most potential examples of Federations that exist are based around neighbouring Circuits, termed "Geographical" Federations, there is no need for this to be the case. The alternative termed an "Interest" Federation.

It is possible for a Circuit to belong to more than one Federation, although it is recognised that care needs to be taken to prevent conflicting interests and decisions. It is unlikely that a Circuit could function in more than one Geographical Federation.

It is possible for a Federation to function at different levels and speeds within and between the constituent Circuits. There is no need for all Circuits to be equally involved at all times.

Most Federations would be stronger in fulfilling their role if a Compact (agreement, remit, terms of reference) is agreed. Two examples of potential Compacts are given in Section 4.

Connexionalism recognises that a decision needs to be taken as locally as possible, commensurate with having the power, ability and authority to make that decision work. Federations may enable this by providing a wider context for a decision, enabling people to better consider the needs of those outside their own Circuit. This is especially important in the area of Stationing.

11.2 Observations on the Fourward Group as currently working

As such things are now understood; the Fourward Group has been working as a Soft Federation for some time and, as such, has been at the vanguard of this emerging new expression of Circuits and Connexionalism. The value of this experience to the wider Church is significant, and other Circuits and districts are looking to the Group as an example of good practice.

An expression of the success of the Fourward Group as a Federation is the smooth and natural way that two Circuits have moved towards a coming together in recognition of their potential future difficulties.

The activities that are recognised as examples of the existing working practice are:

- Regular (quarterly) meetings
- Arranging events (such as Quiet Days)
- Sharing in joint training, especially for LPs
- Pulpit exchanges, shared LPs, and other Plan help
- Shared expertise: eg re the new fire regs, info re Circuit Administrator role
- Offer informal advice on such areas as stationing, employment of lay workers, etc
- Supers meet regularly, and provide each other with v effective mutual support.
- Joint planning in working with wider connexion regarding stationing a married couple in two adjacent Circuits
- Circuit Stewards have begun a series of meetings
- Extensive discussions re Circuit boundaries, and effective mission across the area, especially through the setting up of meetings of 7 rural churches situated on boundaries of Circuits, and who individually come from all four Circuits
- Lent course ideas from one Circuit shared, and picked up by another member Circuit
- Provide an opportunity to discuss common and co-working issues in a friendly and trusting environment

11.3 Recommendations to the Fourward Group meeting

The Sub-Group would like to recommend that the Fourward Group

Recognises its status as a (Soft Geographical) Federation.

Agrees to a Compact that defines their status.

Recognises and celebrates a list of activities they engage in together each year. The list given under 2.3 above could form the first of these, and should be recorded with the Compact.

Maintains discussions about future Circuit shapes, including working with Circuits outside the present group.

Explores shared Lay Employee and Ordained posts, for economy and effectiveness.

Extends the mutual support structure to all ministers and staff.

Explores common training for Circuit office holders and others.

Look towards future patterns of Ministry, Ordained and Lay and especially Superintendency, in order for the group to be well placed to build its mission in the context of the changing Church.

Explores the advantages and potential of further mutual work.

Offers to help the wider Methodist Church, within the District and beyond, by offering to share examples of good practice and experience, and engaging in further analysis and research. *The existing sub-group has been asked to form the core of a Consultation and Development group on Federations, to be convened by the District Development Enabler.*

11.4 Possible wording for a compact.

The Sub-Group would like to recommend the adoption of the following Compact:

The Fourward Group consists of the Andover, Reading & Silchester, Newbury & Hungerford and Basingstoke Circuits of the Methodist Church. They agree to work together in sharing resources, expertise, planning and vision in order to further the Kingdom of God in their area and beyond.

In arriving at the above recommendation the Sub-Group discussed and rejected the following alternative approach:

Andover, Reading & Silchester Circuit, Newbury & Hungerford and Basingstoke Circuits of the Methodist Church recognise their special mutual interests in the Mission of the Church are better served by cooperating and sharing across the group.

They identify that they share many values and common interests, and that they fall within a naturally selecting geographical area, that does not recognise internal boundaries.

They agree to work together to share expertise, resources and vision, according to the needs of the Circuits and the wider church, subject to the wishes of the respective Circuit Meetings.

They note that the four Circuits involved may change through merger or formal boundary change, and that the group provides a strong forum for discussion of such change. They further note that it is appropriate to talk with neighbouring Circuits about future potential.

The grouping should be called “the Fourward Group”, but this may be reviewed as the constituent members change.

The group is currently defined as a Soft Geographical Federation.

11.5 Response of the Fourward Group Meeting

The above report was presented to the full Fourward Group meeting on June 8th 2009 and was formally received by them with thanks.

They agreed to accept all the recommendations. Initially there was reluctance to accept recommendation 3.2 because they are concerned that the flexible, natural and informal nature of the group could be altered. However the following amended Compact was finally agreed.

The Fourward Group consists of the Andover, Reading & Silchester, Newbury & Hungerford and Basingstoke Circuits of the Methodist Church. We are working together, where appropriate, by sharing resources, expertise, planning and vision in order to further the Kingdom of God in our area area and beyond.

12 Appendix C

Federation of Cleveland & Danby Circuits

In July 2000, then Cleveland and Danby Circuits of the Darlington Circuit agreed to work in Federation.

Their agreement was signed on 3rd July 2000 by the two Superintendents, two Circuit Stewards, and the Chair of the Darlington District. This Compact, although the term was not then in use, conforms with expectations for a typical Soft Federation, the wording being as follows:

In this Federation the Cleveland and Danby Circuits commit themselves to:

- 1 Remain financially independent
- 2 Coordinate the timing and making of Circuit Preaching Plans
- 3 Ensure that Ministerial Staff will be interchangeable in either Circuit as cover for each other
- 4 Enable the Danby Minister to share in Cleveland Circuit Staff Days and other special occasions
- 5 Encourage joint participation in training events
- 6 Share information throughout both Circuits
- 7 Increase the informal links between the two Circuits
- 8 Hold an annual joint Circuit Meeting – to deal with any business that affects both Circuits and share fellowship
- 9 Regularly review and update the practical outworking of this Federation
- 10 Pray for each other

The two Circuits subsequently merged. It is expected that further information about this relationship will be added to this report at a later date.

13 Appendix D Acknowledgements

Since the writing of this report has been an extended process of research, comment and creative thinking on the part of a number of people, it is not possible to credit specific ideas to individual people, however I feel it is important to list those who have made a contribution that is significant for its importance, size or encouragement.

The Fourward Group

Rev Peter Catford
Rev David Ellis
Rev Andy Warren
Rev Margaret Locke-Wheaton
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Full Contents

Contents	i
Preface	iii
1 Introduction	1
2 The Evolving Circuit System	2
2.1 Changing Circuit Structure	2
2.2 The Circuit system in crisis?.....	3
2.3 Resources and Staff Shortages	3
2.4 Super Circuits	4
2.5 Organic Change	4
2.6 Subsidiarity	4
2.6.1 Definition	4
2.6.2 Implications	5
3 Federation of Circuits	6
3.1 Key Concepts	6
3.2 Precedents	6
3.3 Why form a Federation?	7
3.3.1 Who could benefit?.....	7
3.3.2 Advantages of Federation for Mission	7
3.3.3 Advantages of Federation for governance and organisation.....	7
3.3.4 Advantages of Federation for staffing and stationing	8
3.3.5 Advantages of Federations for finance and resources	8
3.4 Why not merge?	9
3.5 Soft and Hard Federations.....	9
3.6 Subsidiarity in Federations	10
3.7 Sample models of working collaboratively between Circuits:	11
3.8 Terminology and Key Terms	12
3.8.1 Federation	12
3.8.2 Compact	12
3.8.3 Soft (Federation).....	12

3.8.4	Hard (Federation)	12
3.8.5	Geographic (Federation)	12
3.8.6	Interest (Federation).....	13
3.8.7	Mission	13
3.8.8	Merger.....	13
4	Structural & Missional.....	14
4.1	What is meant by Mission?	14
4.2	What is meant by Structural?	15
4.3	Implications of Missional and Structural Activity	15
4.4	Structural & Missional in a Federation	15
5	Agreeing how to work	17
5.1	Compact	17
5.2	CPD implications	17
5.3	Veto?	18
6	The Superintendent.....	20
6.1	Superintendency Problems	20
6.2	Fresh Expressions of Superintendency!	21
6.3	Separated Superintendent	22
6.3.1	Superintendency provided from outside the Circuit.....	22
6.3.2	Superintendent without pastoral charge.....	22
6.4	The Superintendent in a Federation	23
7	Worship and Pastoral matters.....	24
7.1	Worship	24
7.2	The Plan	24
7.3	Pastoral work	25
8	Hypothetical visions of a Federation model	26
8.1	A Hard Federation.....	26
8.2	A Soft Federation	27
9	Summary	28
9.1	Key Findings	28
9.2	The next step	29
10	Appendix A	30
10.1	Some duties of a Superintendent specified in Standing Orders	30
10.2	General responsibilities	30

10.3	Chairing Meetings.....	30
10.4	Candidates and Probationers.....	30
10.5	Finance and Property	31
11	Appendix B The Fourward Circuit Group	32
11.1	Observations on Federations in general.....	33
11.2	Observations on the Fourward Group as currently working.....	34
11.3	Recommendations to the Fourward Group meeting.....	35
11.4	Possible wording for a compact.....	36
12	Appendix C Federation of Cleveland & Danby Circuits.....	38
13	Appendix D Acknowledgements.....	39
	Full Contents.....	40