**Equality Diversity and Inclusion Training Module**

**Study Group notes**

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**How to use these study notes**

**What is the purpose of these study notes?**

The Methodist Church has published an online Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training module on MCBX. This enables people to complete the training in their own time. However, some people will not be able to access the online training module. Others will prefer to learn alongside others in conversation. The attitudinal and cultural change to which the church has committed will only happen if the learning from this training is discussed within church communities.

These notes provide for a group of people to study the content of the Equality, Diversity and training module together. This could be as part of a Lent or Advent group, or a regularly meeting Bible study, house group or fellowship group.

**Who can lead these study sessions?**

Anyone is able to lead these sessions. There is no requirement to have a trained facilitator. If someone is leading or facilitating the group, they may find it helpful to have completed the training themselves first. However, these notes can be studied by a group together with no prior preparation.

**Materials and equipment**

In addition to these study notes, you will need the following materials needed to run these sessions:

* Computer, projection and sound facilities. The computer will need to be able to connect to the internet
* Bibles

The training material follows the same structure as the material in the JDS User Guide. If copies are available, it may be helpful for participants to have these to follow as they go through the material.

There are also three supplementary documents you will need:

* Legal jurisdictions (session 2)
* Equality Impact Assessment (session 4)
* Personal Responsibility Commitment (session 5)

**Timings**

The material is flexible but each session can be completed within an hour.

**Running a study session**

These study materials consist of notes to read and discuss, and videos to watch. You will need to have an electronic copy of these notes on a computer that is connected to projection and sound, so that you can play the videos.

The written notes can be printed to discuss as a group, though they could also be projected. **If you decide to print materials for your group, please consider the economic and environmental impact of doing so.** The final session contains links to further learning, which are easier to access from an electronic document.

Unlike some study materials, which have only a small amount of reading to prompt discussion, these materials do call for significant reading in each session. You could create more time for discussion by having longer sessions, or you could share the materials in advance for people to read beforehand.

**Maintaining appropriate boundaries**

The following points to consider may help maintain appropriate boundaries when sharing personal examples whilst discussing equality, diversity and inclusion training material.

* Maintain a clear aim. There is a lot of opportunity for sharing personal stories or emotions during these study sessions. However, this should not get in the way of meeting the aims and objectives of the session.
* Stay respectful. Hold in mind those you know. Would you think it appropriate for their story to be related in this way? If not, then don’t say it.

**Aims and Objectives of these study materials:**

Aim: **Affirm the Methodist understanding that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of the gospel**

Objectives:

* Understand that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is key to the gospel
* Know that the Methodist Church affirms that the gospel cannot be lived and shared without commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by all

Aim: **Knowledge of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Objectives:

* Know the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (for England, Scotland & Wales) regarding Protected Characteristics (and other equality legislation across the British Isles, Gibraltar and Malta)
* Be able to recognise breaches of the Equality Act 2010 and other equality legislation
* Be able to apply the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to any situation where people may be excluded from accessing the gospel and living a full life within the church

Aim: **Self-awareness**

Objectives:

* Be able to recognise how the carrying out of our roles can impact on others’ experience of the gospel
* Be able to listen to others without judgement
* Recognise that we all need to continue to develop our understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues as part of our continuing professional development

Aim: **Knowledge of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS): a Methodist approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Objectives:

* Know and understand the basic content of the JDS strategy
* Know the tools for ensuring implementation of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion included within the JDS strategy
* Recognise the expectation that the JDS User Guide is to be used across the Methodist Church in Britain
* Be able to use the Methodist Church Equality Impact Assessment

Aim: **Equipped for continuing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion learning**

Objectives:

* Be able to continue personal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion development through self-directed learning
* Know how to access professional training from external providers
* Be able to read, and learn from, professional training material from external sources, whilst remaining true to the gospel

**Session 1: Working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church**

**Aim of this session:**

To affirm the Methodist understanding that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of the gospel

Objectives:

* Understand that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is key to the gospel
* Know that the Methodist Church affirms that the gospel cannot be lived and shared without commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by all

**Opening prayer:**

God, we come to you and you welcome us. Some of us are tired and others are bristling with energy. Your love upholds each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us. Some of us exploring doubts, and others filled with certainty. Your love inspires each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us. Some of us at peace, and others itching with anxiety. Your love calms each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us. Some of us knowing joy, and others in pain. Your love reaches out to each one of us.

God, we come to you and you welcome us. You search us, and you know us. Each of us fearfully and wonderfully made. Each of us bearing your image. Each of us celebrating your love!

Thank you God. Amen.

 Liam

**Introduction:**

Listen to Revd Jill Marsh, Inclusive Church Implementation Officer, introduce the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training module.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/MDUcnB5U_oM?autoplay=1>

**The Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity**

Methodists are asked to commit to life-long learning about the rich diversity of human life as part of our discipleship in following Jesus Christ.  We hope we can stay open to what we have yet to learn, so we can continue to develop as Methodists. For change to occur, it is important to reflect on the content of these study notes and consider what commitments and further action are needed.

Case studies and stories play a central role in this as they show real experiences, both positive and negative. The stories demonstrate how issues arise through different people’s life experiences. They help us to understand the pain of isolation, patterns of exclusion and inclusion, oppression, discrimination, joy, hope and fear. By sharing these case studies, we hope to encourage reflection, understanding and change on everyone’s part. Above all, we hope to encourage the unheard and marginalised to challenge our prejudices. This can help us all in the ongoing journey where we are still being changed into God’s likeness.

Integral to this is the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Strategy which was adopted by Conference in 2021.

Being Christian, according to this strategy, means:

* celebrating God who made each person in God’s own image
* being disciples of Jesus who treated each person with dignity
* rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all people.

**Discussion: What do you understand ‘being Christian’ to mean?**

The JDS User Guide states this means becoming a church which:

* is free of all forms of discrimination
* celebrates the rich diversity of humanity and recognises that all people are made in the image of God
* has structures and processes which allow everyone to participate fully
* has a leadership which reflects the diversity of our membership
* offers safe spaces for the general public, and for members, to meet with a diversity of people, while still being honestly themselves
* ensures that its leaders are trained to understand issues of equality and exclusion
* listens to, takes seriously, and acts upon any reports of discrimination or prejudice.

**Discussion: In your experience, how close is the Methodist Church to being a church like this?**

Our calling as Methodists has always included a calling to social justice. However, we have often failed to live that out because we have excluded people based on prejudices. These might be people who live with a disability, or have a different ethnicity, sexuality, age, gender or life experience from ourselves. Sometimes we might deliberately exclude someone for one of these reasons because of a prejudice that we hold. Sometimes our biases are unconscious, and we do not realise the negative impact of our words and actions. Yet the belief that all human beings are loved by and created in the image of God is central to who we are as Christians. Our behaviour needs to bear witness to our beliefs.

This is not about 'political correctness'. The strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity was written by more than 40 people, and adopted by the 2021 Conference, because of the negative impact on people's lives when we do not treat each other well. These concerns come from the Bible and are important if we want to bear witness to God's love for all people.

**Discussion: In what ways have you experienced the Methodist Church fail to live out its calling?**

**Why does this matter?**

Here are some quotations from real Methodists which show how we need to change and what a difference it makes when we do!

This work (our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work) is about all people being made in the image of God, it is about a Biblical call to justice, it is about incarnation, it is about the gifting of the Holy Spirit to all baptised people, and is about so much more than equality, diversity and inclusion.

We care about these issues because we are people of faith and disciples of Jesus Christ. The Gospel imperative is that Christ is for all. We are united in Christ.

We are called to ‘love our neighbours as ourselves’.

Below there are quotations which show what some Methodist people around the country have been facing.

1. “It was several years after being told I wasn’t suitable for the position – and doing considerable self-searching to understand why – that I was brave enough to discuss it with others. That’s when I realised my rejection was actually systemic. No one ‘like me’ was deemed suitable.”
2. “There were always two ordained ministers in each church’s staff team, but I was the only woman with four men. When the minister of another church heard that my colleague was retiring, he, looking directly at me, said “so [that church] won’t have a minister then.”
3. “Some people try to be kind and mean well, but can be so patronising. I wheeled myself all the way to church and was feeling quite chipper and proud. The welcome steward took one look at the chair and said, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry’.”
4. At our Local Preachers’ Meeting I heard somebody say, “Well we’ll have a problem next year because we’ll have two Ghanaians and a Sri Lankan in training”. Why am I a problem? It made me want to give up there and then”
5. “I fear that should we fail to embrace this pilgrimage, or should we abandon it because it is too demanding or too dangerous, or too difficult, we will have turned our backs on the gospel and have no good news for the world.”
6. “I have been a member of the church council for five years but never felt comfortable speaking. I left school at 16. When documents are circulated before meetings, I can follow without difficulty, but other council members have resisted making this standard practice. I have recently undergone training at circuit level with more large documents and dense PowerPoint slides which have further knocked my confidence. The nature of my work makes it difficult for me to guarantee my availability for meetings in advance. This has resulted in hurtful questioning of my dedication and commitment.”
7. “I wasn’t “out out” at church but just because it wasn’t something I felt the need to shout about because it’s who I’ve always been. I’ve never hidden it but no one’s ever asked. My friends knew, and it came up occasionally at youth group, so I assumed that the leaders knew. They never mentioned that God wouldn’t love me the same, so it never occurred to me that anyone of my faith wouldn’t love everyone regardless of their sexuality… when it was made obvious that I was wrong, I cried so much. So much hatred. So much fear. And for what? I wasn’t trying to seduce their wives? I wasn’t a sexual deviant preying on the vulnerable. I just wanted to be loved for who I was.”
8. “I stopped being a Reader for the Bible readings and a Communion Steward because the new, higher dais did not include a ramp and I need wheelchair access.”
9. “I am a member of a church on the boundary between the well-off part of town and a large housing estate. I became increasingly worried by the attitudes of church members and suggested the church could start outreach in the estate. Members expressed concerns about the effect outreach onto the estate would have on the church, using stereotype language like scroungers, benefits cheats, lazy unemployed. I was told, ‘We don’t want them in our church.’”
10. “I’ve been told, ‘By having you on the committee, you are helping us because we can tick the inclusivity box.’” “It’s been a privilege to be at Conference but I would have liked to offer when I was younger. Nobody told me it was free to go there and although I would have taken the week off and it didn’t occur to me that anybody else would cover my expenses!”
11. “There is always that sideways glance, that extra eye roving taking in what I am wearing or how I look, and no matter how hard I try, it is always up for scrutiny, more so than if a white person were wearing exactly the same. I feel that if I ever offer anything in church council or at any church meeting, there is always a downward glance, an intake of breath, a benign smile at the corner of lips, a lip service tolerance of ‘allowing’ me to speak, but my words are not heard, only the rhythm and pitch of my voice. I wish I didn’t have to carry these feelings, I wish I didn’t have to stay silent for fear of rocking the boat. I wish I didn’t feel so alone in Church.”

On the other hand… here are some quotations which show what a difference it can make to pay attention to one another and to change our way of living so that all people can participate equally in the Methodist Church.

1. “I am dyslexic, and I find it very difficult to use either the screen or the normal print size copy of Singing the Faith. One of the churches where I am the minister, when I told them I was having problems, invested in large print copies of the hymn book, and put one in the vestry so I would always have it ready for services. It felt good to be cared about in that very practical way. Along with making sure there is always coloured paper in the photocopier for me, it shows how simple steps can make a big difference.”
2. “I’ve been really impressed that my district’s District Policy Committee has changed its meeting times so that I can join in. They didn’t need to, at one level, but as I work it would have been impossible to go along to the meetings, even after I was voted in as a younger person. They’ve all put themselves out so that I can take part and I appreciate that.”
3. “I have suffered from poor mental health for many years, and living in a small rural place, where everyone knows a lot about everyone else, can make me want to hide. However, I have found the church to be very supportive. When I have down days I can share with people and know that they will be praying. When I have good days, I can share that too and people will rejoice with me. The church community really has become my family. Even in lock-down they have only been a What’s App group message away.”
4. “Even though people knew me at church as a girl as a child they have accepted me for who I am over all these years and they show that they love me however I might change”
5. “This will demand, of us all, penitence and hope, patience and commitment. But what if our life together were to be imagined as an ever-changing dance, where new steps can be introduced, and new rhythms and movements explored; where each encounter with ‘the other’ was approached as an opportunity to experience enrichment as we discover new aspects of our shared humanity?”
6. “I’ve been given the opportunity and responsibility to ignite a young-person-led movement for other young people, ‘empowering young leaders’ in the district. My thoughts and ideas have been recognised and acted upon which has left me feeling strongly valued.”
7. “The other Local Preachers have made me so welcome and when they don’t understand me they just ask me to repeat myself until they ‘get’ me. It can be hard speaking in my third language in church but people are so encouraging and I get the sense they are excited to hear from my experience of life, faith and the world.”
8. “The difference it makes is amazing. My church has started a scheme for helping us to pool our money and now I can afford better food, even trips out occasionally (when COVID lets me of course!) because people are generous and they’ve found a way of helping me to share with others and to keep my self-respect.”
9. “I cried during the prayers the first time that my minister used the word ‘Siblings’ to describe us all because I suddenly knew I was recognised. As a non-binary person I never felt included by ‘brothers and sisters’ but when my minister said, one Sunday, “Brothers, sisters, siblings” I knew she had noticed me. That helped me see that God notices me too.”
10. I feel part of a movement that is bravely lifting heads towards God, being given the chance to speak out against injustice and for my words to have been heard and understood. The nature of my heart has been felt, not the colour of my skin. For once in my UK Church life, I feel the warmth of hope in reality and not just silently in my heart.”
11. “As I have carried on in this church, God has not taken away my mental illness, but he has removed the sting from it by enabling me to have insight into my illness and manage it very well. My identity is not defined by my illness. I am proud to call myself a Christian. I think this is from God’s Holy Spirit living in me. He also gives me a wonderful sense of belonging to God’s family on earth.”

These are real examples, though anonymous.

They show the difference that our attitudes can make. Let’s pray to be able to see people as God sees them. Let’s learn from one another, all made in the image of God.

**Discussion: How do you feel having read these examples? Have you had any experiences within the church, positive or negative, you would like to share?**

**Bible reflection:**

Within the Bible there are stories of discrimination against people, including stories of enslavement, sexual violence, and considering disability to be a sin. However, there are broader and deeper golden threads throughout Scripture, which challenge these stories and point towards a God whose love is universal.

Read [Genesis 1:26-27](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A26-27&version=NRSV), [Isaiah 2:1-4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%202:1-4&version=NIV), and [Luke 10:25-37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25-37&version=NIV).

**Discussion: How do these stories point towards God’s universal love?**

Jesus showed God’s love by his openness to all people, including reaching out to those who were shunned in his day. He was often criticised for keeping company with people that others thought he should keep away from. Yet, in Jesus Christ, strangers became friends.

Read [Acts 2:42-47](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2%3A42-47&version=NRSV).

**Discussion: Does this match your experience of fellowship within the Methodist Church?**

The early Christians understood that God’s Holy Spirit was breaking down old boundaries and divisions. They shared a new understanding of the range of God’s gifts in their lives. This variety was seen to be crucial in the building up of the early Christian community. It was described as the Body of Christ, in which each part of the body was dependent upon the other parts. Many of the letters written by Paul and others to the Early Church speak of the importance of good and healthy relationships within the Christian community. Christians are to be a sign of God’s kingdom and a reflection of God’s unconditional love. Jesus told his followers that they were to “love one another ... as I have loved you” ([John 13:34](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+13%3A34&version=NRSV)).

Read [Acts 10: 9-48](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+10%3A9-48&version=NRSVUE), [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+12%3A12-31&version=NRSVUE) and [Romans 12: 1-8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+12%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE)

**Discussion: How does your local church community benefit from having a variety of different people?**

**The teaching of the Methodist Church:**

The Faith and Order Committee agreed several theological reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

It notes that in [Galatians 3:28- 29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A28-+29&version=NRSV) we are told our unity is not found in our intrinsic nature, but through our common redemption in Jesus Christ. If one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers. We have to work with those we might disagree with, or who have a different Christian experience to us. It also says how Methodists understand that salvation is the ongoing experience of God’s loving, transforming presence. It helps us to grow and become the people God intended, helping us to grow in our ability to live as Jesus did, deepening our knowledge and love of God, and showing that love through the ways in which we live our lives.  Part of the Church’s mission is its commitment to social justice. It concludes that the Church’s commitment to matters of equality, diversity and inclusion is founded on the belief that God’s love is universal.

**Discussion: How have you experienced the transforming power of God within your church community?**

**Closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

**Question 1:**

**Why is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to the Methodist Church?**

* **Part of the Church's mission is its commitment to social justice**
* **Because Jesus told us to love one another ... as I have loved you**
* **All humankind is made in God's image and is therefore worthy of dignity and respect**
* **Our behaviour needs to bear witness to our beliefs**

**Question 2:**

**Who needs to be committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?**

* **Everyone in the church**
* **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officers**

**Closing prayer:**

God of all, praise and thanks be yours through Jesus,

who at his birth received visits from shepherds and foreigners,

who invited fishermen and tax collectors to be his disciples,

who taught us not to judge others,

who healed a Roman’s servant and a Canaanite’s daughter,

who was happy to be counted as one who ate and drank with sinners,

who challenged religious leaders for neglecting justice, mercy and faith,

who sets before us an example of the inclusive mission and ministry of the gospel.

Cleanse us by your Holy Spirit, and as we reject and resist discrimination may we truly love and serve you as we love and serve all. In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Mark

**Answers to closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

Question 1:

Why is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to the Methodist Church?

* Part of the Church's mission is its commitment to social justice
* Because Jesus told us to love one another ... as I have loved you
* All humankind is made in God's image and is therefore worthy of dignity and respect
* Our behaviour needs to bear witness to our beliefs

Answer: All are correct answers

Question 2:

Who needs to be committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?

* Everyone in the church
* Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officers

Answer: Everyone in the church

**Session 2: Methodism Today**

**Aim of this session:**

Knowledge of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Objectives:

* Know the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (for England, Scotland & Wales) regarding Protected Characteristics (and other equality legislation across the British Isles, Gibraltar and Malta)
* Be able to recognise breaches of the Equality Act 2010 and other equality legislation
* Be able to apply the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to any situation where people may be excluded from accessing the gospel living a full life within the church

**Opening prayer:**

Let the pride of the powerful surrender to love.

Let the prejudice of the privileged surrender to love.

Let the bitter corners of our hearts surrender to love.

Let the cold of our uncaring ways surrender to love.

Let the brokenness of our estrangements surrender to love.

Let our ignorance surrender to love.

Let us surrender all to love, as we pray to the Holy One who encompasses all creation with love.

Amen.

 Ruth

**Introduction:**

As the Methodist Church, we inherit the traditions of the church in the past but also need to consider the context of our society today.

We belong to a Church with a rich history in promoting welfare and working for justice and equality. John Wesley taught to "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can."  Methodists were to work to improve the lives of others. Throughout its history, the church has responded to the social problems of its day.  In the 18th century, this included reaching out to those who were not part of the parish structure of the Church of England and faced legal restrictions, and opposing slavery.  In the 19th century, the church campaigned against alcoholism and was active in forming trade unions.  Children's Homes were set up to provide for children living in the street and the charity National Children's Home (NCH) was founded in 1869.  In the 20th century there was social work outreach in cities and Racism Awareness Workshops in the 1980s.  NCH became Action for Children, in recognition of the provision of a range of services to support children in the home. This work is continuous, and we’re all part of it.

**Discussion: What other examples of social justice work from Methodist history can you think of?**

**Social justice and the history of the Methodist Church in Britain**

Methodism began during the 18th century evangelical protestant revival.  This was the time of the agricultural revolution.  There was rapid population growth and an increasing gap between rich and poor.  It was also the age of the beginning of the British Empire.

There was spiritual renewal across Europe and North America.  Protestant denominations and church numbers increased.  The Methodist Church grew out of the ministry of John and Charles Wesley, taking the gospel to those who were not part of the Church of England’s parish system.  They established local classes and societies and organised a conference of those who followed their preaching.

For John and Charles Wesley, good works were a core part of Christian living, along with prayer and Bible study.  Caring for the poor, prisoners, widows and orphans was an important part of a Christian life.  Methodists did not only care about welfare, they also aimed to ensure justice. John Wesley was influenced by Olaudah Equiano. His last known letter urged the abolition of 'that execrable villainy' slavery.  The Wesleys influenced prison reform and, inspired by Susanna Wesley, were pioneers in education.  John Wesley wrote about theology, politics, music, marriage, slavery and medicine.

In the 19th century, the industrial revolution brought even more population growth and social change.  There was urban growth and a further increase in the gap between rich and poor.  The Methodist movement split into different churches.  Legal restrictions against non-conformist Christians were removed and church numbers grew rapidly.

The Methodist Church also began missionary work across the British Empire, becoming a global church.  The Church was active on social issues, including campaigning against the problems caused by alcohol, deprivation issues within cities, and for the establishment of trade unions.

At the start of the 20th century, the Primitive, Wesleyan and United Methodist churches came back together, forming the current Methodist Church in 1932.  The missions in cities developed a social work outreach.  Overseas Districts become autonomous Conferences, working together through the World Methodist Council.  Methodist Homes was established in 1943 and has become the largest charity care provider in the UK.  The Methodist Church began the ordination of women in 1974.  In 1978, the Methodist Conference declared racism a “direct contradiction of the Gospel of Jesus”.  From 1981, Methodist and Ecumenical Leadership Racism Awareness Workshops began under the leadership of Sybil Phoenix and the Revd Vic Watson.  The Methodist Community and Race Relations Committee was established in the 1980s.  This became the Racial Justice Committee in 1995, then the Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in 2014, before the adoption of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity in 2021.

In 2003, the Methodist Church signed a Covenant with the Church of England with “the goal of full visible unity”.  The Methodist Church in Britain is now a multi-cultural church, with members who have come from the Methodist family from around the world.

In 2021 the church affirmed that there are two understandings of marriage and made practical provisions for both the view that marriage can only be between a man and a woman and the view that marriage can be between any two people.  This has enabled same-sex marriages to be conducted in Methodist churches.

**Our calling as Methodists today**

Our Calling as the Methodist Church today is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.  We do this through **Worship**; **Learning and Caring** for one another as Christians; **Service** to those in need and challenging injustice; and **Evangelism** to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

This requires a culture where we care for one another, are inclusive, and are connected to one another by being centred in God. We all depend on one another and the relationships we have are mutual. This places ‘belonging’ at the heart of church life. Methodists believe God’s grace is offered freely to all people. Hospitality, openness and welcome for all are key to demonstrating God’s grace and love for all. This welcome needs to include opportunities for each person to participate fully as ourselves. John Wesley taught that the Holy Spirit changes us and we become “perfected in love” and “filled with the love of God and neighbour”. So we seek relationships with a deep appreciation of one another, in which we discover God working in and through us all.

There has never been a perfect Christian community. Broken relationships, discrimination and exclusivity have all been part of the life of the Church. This is still true today. Tragically, there have been incidents of discrimination, coercive control and abuse of power which have not been challenged. Our Church falls a long way short of the interdependent Body of Christ we are called to be by God. Within the Church, some people are not accepted, respected and treated as equals. This must change.

As the Methodist Church, we are called to engage positively with wider society and with our local communities. Many of us have experiences at work and in our communities which can help us all learn to relate respectfully to each other within the Church. By having positive relationships with others across difference within the Church, we also learn more about the world around us. This learning can equip us to engage with our neighbourhoods, workplaces and society today.

**Discussion: In what ways is our Methodist history important to you?**

**Equality legislation**

We are called by God to be the interdependent Body of Christ. We are called to love one another and appreciate God in one another. We are called to practice justice. This should mean we go beyond the minimum standards required by equality legislation. Nevertheless, the Methodist Church in Britain is a public organisation. This means there is equality legislation that applies to us and with which we must comply.

The next section of the training will cover the principles contained within that legislation.

There is different equality law in the different jurisdictions in which the Methodist Church in Britain operates.

**Supplementary document: Note the additional document that introduces the equality legislation that is relevant to your jurisdiction. You do not need to read it now.**

Equality legislation sets out a number of protected characteristics or grounds, defines different types of discrimination that are unlawful, and outlines any exemptions to these rules (for example, exemptions are allowed for ‘single characteristic organisations’, such as single-sex private members’ clubs. However, these do not apply to the Methodist Church in Britain since we are not a single characteristic organisation).

**Discussion: What experience of equality legislation do you have in other areas of your life?**

**Protected characteristics/grounds:**

**Age**

Age discrimination can relate to someone being a specific age (e.g. 70 years old) or within an age range (e.g. a young adult). There are exceptions for children within education and where legislation places age limits on certain activities (e.g. it is not age discrimination to refuse to sell alcohol to those under the age limit).

**Disability**

A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.  'Physical impairment' covers long-term, fluctuating and progressive conditions. 'Mental impairment' covers mental health conditions, learning disabilities and learning difficulties.  Anyone who has previously had an impairment is also protected from discrimination.

Organisations have a responsibility to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for some who has a disability, except where they can demonstrate that reasonable adjustments are not possible in this instance.  What is considered ‘reasonable’ may vary depending on the size, budget and facilities of an organisation.

Discrimination arising from disability occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because of something connected to their disability where it cannot be shown to be objectively justified.

**Gender reassignment**

This characteristic refers to anyone who is at any stage of a process of transitioning from one gender to another. This does not require them to have any medical procedure, nor to be intending to fully transition to a different gender. So, for example, someone who wears clothing that is consider standard for a gender that is not the same as their biological sex, would be protected by this characteristic. The term ‘gender reassignment’ can be seen as outdated, since it presumes that gender is something that is ‘assigned’ to us rather than being a part of our identity. Nevertheless, gender identity and gender fluidity are implicitly protected under this characteristic.

There are no religious exemptions to this protection.

**Marriage and civil partnership**

Being in a marriage or a civil partnership, including a same-sex marriage, is protected under equality law (except in Jersey).  This means someone cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of being married or in a civil partnership.  Those who are single are not protected under equality legislation.

There are no religious exemptions to this protection, nor can a religious organisation’s own definition of marriage affect a person’s legal rights. However, religious organisations can expect office holders to abide by their code of discipline (for example, the Roman catholic Church does not permit its clergy to marry).

**Pregnancy and maternity**

Pregnancy refers to the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby, and maternity to the period after the birth of a child. In non-employment contexts, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth. It includes treating someone unfavourably because they are breastfeeding.

**Race**

This protects people against inequality based on their skin colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins (in the Isle of Man, caste discrimination is also explicitly protected).

The Methodist Church rejects the racial theory that developed in Europe in the 17th Century, which divided humanity into different races with supposed biological differences. Instead, the Methodist Church affirms that we are all one human race. As such, the Methodist Church in Britain uses the term ‘ethnicity’ to refer to our differences in skin colour and national origins.

**Religious belief**

As well as religious beliefs, non-religious philosophical beliefs, such as atheism, are also protected, provided they are genuinely-held, cogent, serious, apply to a substantial aspect of human behaviour and are not incompatible with human dignity or the rights of others (for example, veganism is a protected belief).

Denominations, such as Methodism, are considered a religion for the purposes of equality law.

Everyone has the right to manifest their religion or belief, through example through clothing or symbols.  However this right can be limited by an employer if it is necessary for the role.

Religious and faith organisations can require officers to have faith or be subject to the discipline of the organisation, where it is relevant to their role. However for other roles, for example those that are purely administrative, this characteristic/ground applies. So in its role as an employer of administrative staff, it is unlawful for the Methodist Church to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief.

(This protection does not apply in Jersey).

**Sex**

Equality protects the rights of men and women, based on their sex. Those who are intersex, or whose gender identity does not align with their assigned biological sex, are also protected, but under the ‘gender reassignment’ protected characteristic.

Religious exemptions are permitted, but they must be related to the theology of the religion (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church is permitted not to have female priests). The Methodist Church is of the view that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of sex.

**Sexual orientation**

People are protected no matter whether they are attracted to people of the same sex, or a different sex from themselves, or both. Those who are asexual are not protected under equality legislation.

Religious exemptions are permitted, but they must be related to the theology of the religion.  The Methodist Church provides for its clergy to not conduct same-sex marriages if their personal conviction is in opposition.  In fact, no minister can be compelled to conduct any marriage.  However, the Methodist Church does not permit sexual orientation to be a barrier to candidating for ministry or stationing and it permits its clergy to enter into same-sex marriages.  Individuals are not permitted to ignore this based on their own personal theology.  There is no right to exemption based on individual religious beliefs.

**Introduction to discrimination**

There are different types of discrimination that are unlawful under equality law, and are therefore not permitted within the Methodist Church in Britain.

**Direct discrimination**

This is where a person is treated less favourably than another person because of any of the protected characteristics/grounds.

**Indirect discrimination**

This is when a policy, rule or procedure applies to everyone, but has a disproportionate impact on people with any of the protected characteristics/grounds.

**Discrimination based on association**

This is where there is discrimination against a person because they have an association with someone with a protected characteristic/ground (in Great Britain, this does not apply to marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity). (This type of discrimination is not explicitly prohibited in Jersey, Gibraltar or Malta).

**Discrimination based on perception**

This is where there is discrimination because someone believes a person has a protected characteristic/ground, even if they do not actually have that characteristic/ground (in Great Britain, this does not apply to marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity).

(This type of discrimination is not explicitly prohibited in Jersey, Guernsey, Gibraltar or Malta).

**Harassment**

This is conduct relating to a particular characteristic/ground, which has the purpose of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (in Great Britain, this does not apply to marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity). Sexual harassment is unlawful under this provision.

**Victimisation**

This is where a person is treated badly because they have, or are suspected of having, raised a complaint under the Equality Act.

**Dual discrimination**

This is where there are is discrimination based on two combined characteristics/grounds.  For example, it is unlawful to discriminate against Black women, even if other women and Black men are not discriminated against.

**Positive action**

Positive action refers to actions that are designed to remove barriers that might prevent people with certain characteristics/grounds from being employed or progressing through an organisation.  For example, positive action could be undertaken to avoid under-representation of people with protected characteristics in senior roles.  These actions are lawful, however someone from an under-represented group can only be favoured if they are at least equally well-qualified for a role as another candidate.  It is unlawful to favour them if there is another more qualified candidate.

**Alleged discriminator’s characteristics**

The characteristics/grounds of an alleged discriminator are irrelevant. So, for example, when considering whether or not discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has taken place, the sexual orientation of the person alleged to have discriminated is not relevant.

**Single-characteristic groups and organisations**

It is permissible to have groups and services that are only available to people with a protected characteristic, provided there is a legitimate reason and a suitable alternative. For example, single-sex schools are permitted provided there are sufficient school places for all pupils in other schools. So a prayer group that was only for people of a particular characteristic would be permitted, provided there were other prayer groups that were open to all.

**Going beyond equality legislation**

We are called to be the interdependent Body of Christ, where all can find belonging, experience the love of God and find their identity as a child of God made in God’s image. So we need to treat all people with dignity and worth. This means more than just meeting the minimum standards of equality legislation, which apply to all public organisations.

For example, there are a range of groups of people who are not explicitly protected from discrimination and inequality by legislation. Yet we would not want them to experience injustice within the Methodist Church. These include:

* Those who have experienced abuse
* Those who have experienced childlessness
* Those disadvantaged by social class or economic injustice
* Those with less formal education
* Those with carer status (though draft legislation in Guernsey is scheduled to include carers within equality law protection from 2023).

To ensure justice and dignity for all, it may be helpful to apply the principles that underlie equality legislation to these groups, or to anyone who faces injustice or exclusion within our churches. This list is not exhaustive.  No area of human difference should prevent anyone being treated with dignity as a child of God within the Church.  We stand in solidarity with people who feel marginalised.  Moreover, we celebrate and cherish diversity as intrinsic to God's creation.

**Discussion: What other groups can face injustice in our Church?**

**Closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

Disclaimer: these scenarios are used for illustrative training purposes only.  The information should not be taken as professional legal advice.

**Question 1: Jim’s story**

Jim works full-time and has two children. His church recently established a mission committee to try to help it be more of a presence in the community and attract a broader demographic of people. Jim saw this as the perfect opportunity and was gratefully accepted into the group. When Jim received the notice of the first meeting, he saw that it was scheduled for during the working day and he would be unable to attend. When he pointed this out, he was told that almost everyone who volunteers to be on committees is retired and that they do not like to be out in the evenings, and that church meetings had always been held during the day. Jim was forced to withdraw from the committee.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The policy on the timing of the meetings is the same for everyone. However it has a disproportionate impact on those of working age. This is indirect discrimination and is therefore unlawful discrimination on the grounds of age.
2. The mission committee is a voluntary committee and it is reasonable for the timing to be set to suit the majority of the committee. Equality legislation does not apply to this committee.

**Question 2: Jefferson’s story**

Jefferson has been a member of the Church Council at his church for nearly five years. The membership of the church generally has a high level of education. Jefferson left school at the age of 16. Despite being a successful tradesman, he has never felt the equal of other members of the Council. Discussions and presentations at meetings rely heavily on paperwork presented at the time and Jefferson finds it hard to keep up. When documents are circulated before meetings Jefferson is able to follow without difficulty, but other Council members have resisted making this standard practice. Jefferson feels embarrassed because no action has been taken.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The church council is a voluntary group and it is reasonable for the materials to be presented and shared in a way that suits the majority of the council. Equality legislation does not apply to this council.
2. Although the materials are the same for everyone, a high level of education is not necessary to be an effective member of the council. The working practices of the council have a disproportionate impact on those with a lower level of education. They therefore amount to indirect discrimination and are unlawful.
3. The working practices of the council have a disproportionate impact on those with a lower level of education and amount to indirect discrimination. However, a lower level of education is not a protected characteristic/ground and so this is not unlawful. Nevertheless, an understanding and application of the concept of indirect discrimination in this instance can help ensure that everyone in the Methodist Church is treated equally, not just those protected by legislation.

**Question 3: Ann’s story**

Ann is a wheelchair user. Currently, her church is undergoing renovation. The traditionalists want to keep the existing permanent pews. Ann has tried to explain that for her this means either sitting right at the back or at the front of the church where she feels separated from everyone else. She has overheard people say that she is too sensitive, which she found very hurtful, and not giving her the opportunity to say what her needs are. Recently, she mentioned that the kitchen was not accessible for those in wheelchairs and one of the regular kitchen helpers said, “We don’t ordinarily get one of you lot in here anyway.” The comment left her feeling deflated and disempowered.

Which of the following is correct?

1. Ann has not been excluded from any role due to her disability and she is still able to attend worship even with the pews. So no unlawful discrimination has taken place.
2. If the comments towards Ann create an intimidating, degrading or humiliating environment, this would amount to harassment and would be unlawful.

**Question 4: Jan’s story**

A couple of families had sat in the same pews at the very front for many years. A woman with impaired hearing started coming to church. She asked that she be given space to sit at the front as lip reading helped her in understanding what was being said. Both families objected and one suggested that she got herself “stronger hearing aids”. The minister moved the pews back, creating room for the woman and a number of small children to sit on chairs at the front.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The church does have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to enable Jan to participate. The size, budget and facilities of the church need to be taken into account in determining what is reasonable. The fact that moving the pews was a feasible option means that, had the church refused and expected Jan to purchase a stronger hearing aid, this would have been discrimination arising from disability and would have been unlawful.
2. Although the church has a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate Jan, this doesn’t mean she doesn’t also have a personal responsibility to ensure she can access worship. It is unreasonable to expect the church to move pews to accommodate her need to lip read and it is reasonable to ask her if there are stronger hearing aids on the market that she could purchase.

**Question 5: James’ story**

After a successful career as a performer, James felt the call to ordained ministry and began the process of becoming a minister. James suffered verbal abuse from those around him, including his tutors. James found his sexuality questioned even though he is heterosexual. This has continued within church communities, with members of staff commenting that, “we’re so glad you’re married, otherwise we’d be worried!”

Which of the following is correct?

1. James is not gay and so does not have a protected characteristic/ground. As such, he is not protected by equality legislation.
2. Even though James is not gay, this would be discrimination based on perception and would therefore be unlawful.

**Question 6: Peter’s story**

Peter was born into a very large family, the oldest boy with five sisters. From an early age Peter would set up Sunday school in the kitchen and read from the children’s Bible, then get his sisters to draw pictures, which they all loved. Peter decided to put himself forward to teach Sunday school, as this is where he saw his calling within the church. He was told because of safeguarding reasons, they had decided that the Sunday school teachers would only be women, as parents were uncomfortable with men in this role. It was suggested that instead of Sunday school, he should work in the youth club with the football team.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The Methodist Church is made up of its members and, as members, the parents have a right to decide who should lead the youth group and that it be someone with whom they are comfortable. It is not a paid position of employment so equality law does not apply.
2. The Methodist Church is a public organisation and subject to equality law. This is direct discrimination on the grounds of sex and is unlawful.

**Question 7: Richard’s story**

Richard responded to an urgent request for volunteers to share in leadership of the church youth group. His offer was accepted once a clear DBS check had been received and safeguarding procedures and training completed. After a few months, one parent visited the minister to say that he and a number of parents had learnt that Richard was gay. These parents no longer wanted Richard to be involved in the Christian care and nurture of children and young people.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The Methodist Church is made up of its members and, as members, the parents have a right to decide who should lead the youth group and that it be someone with whom they are comfortable. It is not a paid position of employment so equality law does not apply.
2. The Methodist Church is a public organisation and subject to equality law. This is direct discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and is unlawful.
3. Members of the Methodist Church have different views on human sexuality. This is accepted as contradictory convictions and the church makes practical arrangements for the practice of all views. So these parents have a right to have a youth group led by someone who is heterosexual if that is their theological conviction.

**Question 8: Rumana’s story**

Rumana has just been appointed to provide general administration and office support to the circuit leadership team. Rumana has chosen to wear a hijab as part of her expression of her faith as a Muslim. Tom, a circuit steward, told Rumana on several occasions that it wasn’t appropriate that her husband had made her “wear that headscarf”. He has also been quite vocal in the local community about what he says are “concerns about the dangers of Islam”.

Which of the following is correct?

1. Members of the church have freedom of conscience to express their views on religious issues. As such, Tom’s speech is protected and is lawful.
2. The Methodist Church is exempt from equality legislation relating to religious belief and is entitled to expect Rumana to follow its discipline. This gives the circuit stewards the right to ask her not to wear a hijab at work.
3. The Methodist Church has employed Rumana in an administrative role and therefore has a legal obligation to ensure she does not face discrimination on the grounds of her religious belief. If Tom has created an intimidating, degrading or humiliating environment, this would be harassment and would be unlawful.

**Question 9: Maya’s story**

Although Maya had seen a number of notices in the church newsletter asking for people to become stewards, there was never any real explanation of what being a steward entailed. Having seen no one like her in a leadership position, Maya assumed that the adverts were not aimed at her. The minister approached her one day after the service. He explained briefly what being a steward meant and mentioned that he thought she would make a very good steward. After some thought and prayer Maya put herself forward. The leadership of the church has been very supportive of her, in particular her efforts to broaden the appeal of leadership to people.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The minister has taken positive action to recruit someone who was different from the other members of the church leadership. Since the number of notices suggest there was not another more qualified candidate who was overlooked, this is lawful.
2. By taking personal time to speak to Maya and not to other potential candidates, the minister has demonstrated bias and this is unlawful.

**Question 10: Kofi’s story**

Kofi’s Methodist church has had great success at building relationships within the church with the sharing of meals after services. Kofi noticed that all the meals served are traditional British and attendance by members of ethnic minority communities was low. Kofi suggested that once a month one of the ethnic minority communities would prepare the food to encourage everyone to feel an equal part of the church. This idea was dismissed without any real discussion. One lay leader commented that, “We wouldn’t be able to get the smell of your kind of food out of the church.” The church leadership argued that the number of people in the church from ethnic minority groups was quite small and that the majority of church members had the right to decide how the church should be run.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The preparing of food is part of the life of the church, which is a public organisation. So barring members of ethnic minority communities from this role is direct discrimination and unlawful.
2. This is part of the social life of the church and so the majority of members should have the right to decide what food is eaten at these social events.

**Question 11: Daniel’s story**

Daniel is ten years old and has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). His parents recently moved near a local church. He attended the Sunday school but the teacher told his parents that his behaviour was out of control. The parents agreed to withdraw Daniel and keep him with them in church for a couple of weeks before attempting to have him attend Sunday school again. On his return to Sunday school, they agreed they would take it in turns to sit with him. The next Sunday, Daniel started off well in main church but then started walking around the church, breaking into song a couple of times. His father took him out of the church, keeping him until the service was over. At the end of the service, the minister spoke to both parents and urged that it might be best if they took care of Daniel and did not attend church.

Which of the following is correct?

1. The size and facilities of the church need to be taken into account when deciding what reasonable adjustments should be made for Daniel. However, there is no discrimination against his parents since they do not have a protected characteristic/ground.
2. In addition to the question of whether the church have made sufficient reasonable adjustment for Daniel, any discrimination against his parents would be discrimination based on association and could also be unlawful.

**Question 12: Olu’s story**

Olu was born in the UK to a family of refugees who had fled civil war. On arrival, the Methodist Church had been instrumental in helping her family to settle in their local community. Though Olu had times when it was presumed that she was ‘foreign’, she felt confident in her identity and her ability to challenge unwelcome comments. She felt more vulnerable as a woman, as comments about her ‘rightful place’ came from friends and family as well as strangers. When Olu became a presbyter not everyone in the Church agreed that a woman should take on this role. It was suggested by a few that she should perhaps be a deacon as this was a role more suited for women. Once stationed, she found that at times she was sidelined and not included.

Which of the following is correct? Please note there are two correct answers to this question so please check two boxes.

1. Religious organisations are exempt from legislation on discrimination on the grounds of sex, where this is not in keeping with their theology. So individual Methodist churches can decide, as part of the stationing process, whether or not to accept a minister who is a woman and it is therefore reasonable for the issue to be discussed.
2. Members of the Methodist Church have different views on the role of women in ministry. This is accepted as contradictory convictions and members of the church have the right to express their views on this issue.
3. The Methodist Church has no exemption for discrimination on the grounds of sex with regards to stationing. If the comments and sidelining of Olu create an intimidating or hostile environment, this would be harassment and would be unlawful.
4. Even though Olu feels comfortable challenging unwelcome comments regarding the assumption she is foreign, that does not mean that they do not amount to harassment. Although she is not foreign, this would be discrimination based on perception. Additionally, since the assumption that she is foreign is based on her ethnic heritage, this would be discrimination under the protected characteristic/ground of race.

**Closing prayer:**

It’s so easy, Lord, to behave in a way that isn’t welcoming;

to only want people like us; those who talk like us, think like us and act like us.

It’s hard to welcome those who behave in strange ways, those who challenge our preconceived ideas and those we struggle to like.

Yet you call us to love all.

Forgive us for the times when we have been unwelcoming, for the times we haven’t loved and for the times we have turned your children away.

Forgive us, for just as those who we have turned away need the good news of your radical love, so do we.

In the name of Christ.

Amen.

James

**Answers to closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

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 Answer

1. Jim’s story A

2. Jefferson’s story C

3. Ann’s story B

4. Jan’s story A

5. James’ story B

6. Peter’s story  B

7. Richard’s story B

8. Rumana’s story C

9. Maya’s story A

10. Kofi’s story B

11. Daniel’s story B

12. Olu’s story C&D

**Session 3: What sort of change are we committing to?**

**Aim of this session:**

Self-awareness

Objectives:

* Be able to recognise how the carrying out of our roles can impact on others’ experience of the gospel
* Be able to listen to others without judgement
* Recognise that we all need to continue to develop our understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues as part of our continuing professional development

**Opening prayer:**

Lord of all, forgive the narrowness of my vision; the hidden prejudices that lead me to dismiss others as unsuitable for your kingdom; the desire to claim you for my own and to shape you into an image that makes you a comfortable companion for me.

My only hope is in the transforming power of your love that can shatter my exclusive images of you, open me to the challenge of your voice and give me new understandings of the breadth, depth and reach of your love.

To you, all are of worth and all are called – even an imperfect disciple such as me.

Amen.

Keith

**Introduction:**

The Methodist Church has committed to change.

Opening ourselves up to the change God wants to work in us, and recognising the real trauma of exclusion and disadvantage experienced by many within the Church, we need to understand the type and scale of the transformation needed.

**“Structural change”** means that the Church must review the way it works, accepting that previous and current ways of working have left many people excluded. Changes in our policies and organisational arrangements will be necessary. We will need to make sure that all voices are heard and that there is transparency in everything we do.

**“Cultural change”** can be described as change to ‘the way things are done around here’. Every individual, church, circuit, district and the Connexional team will need to reflect on the values, beliefs and assumptions we have. We will then need to learn to behave, interact, make decisions and carry out activities in ways that make it possible for a bigger variety of people to be fully part of God’s Church.

**“Attitudinal change”** will involve every Methodist being open to a change of heart, mind and actions. This will include listening and learning, and challenging our own assumptions. We all need to take responsibility for recognising our own fears and prejudices, and negative or damaging perceptions and behaviours. We need to learn about our own power, and how to use it to enable and strengthen, rather than control or put down, others within the Body of Christ.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will then reflect God’s love for all people in a way that enriches us all.

**A connexional church**

Methodism understands itself to be a connexional Church. Connexionalism is identified in terms of belonging, mutuality and interdependence. All Christians are essentially linked to one another; no local church is or can be an independent unit complete in itself. At the heart of such interdependent relationships is conversation, which implies a resolve to listen, as well as to speak, to overcome differences and move towards shared understandings. The practice of Christian conferring characterises the way in which Methodists make decisions, theologically reflect, and enter into relationships within and beyond the Church.

**Discussion: What visible traits of the Church’s unity do you see where you are?**

In order for change to be meaningful, it has to have an impact right across the church; and this change must be seen and demonstrated in our structures, our culture and in our attitudes. We the Church, the body of Christ, must imbibe and inhabit the way of Christ so that our corporate personality and expectations demonstrate an inclusive “oneness”.

“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” ([1 Corinthians 10:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+10%3A17&version=NRSV))”

**Discussion: What traits do you see which are hampering everyone feeling this “oneness” Jesus demonstrates in the Eucharist?**

Watch a video to reflect on what it means to be a connexional church.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/zRwt25M5nGw?autoplay=1>

Our Church culture is often first encountered by what someone sees and experiences, and it is an expression of what's really going on below the surface. It can best be understood by observing the behaviour, the attitudes, the value and belief system of those who belong.

Organisational culture can be defined as a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organisation from other organisations. The main traits of the culture can be either strong or weak. In a strong culture the main values are intensely held and widely shared. Where culture is strong, people do things because they believe it is the right thing to do. The majority of the people in the organisation believe in them and  the attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values of the entire organisation is closely tied to the mission and programmes of that organisation.

Watch a video to reflect on what it means to be the church of God.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/BEhsS8mKYeM?autoplay=1>

**Discussion: In what ways have you experienced a strong culture in the Methodist Church? In what ways can our organisational culture undermine our beliefs and values?**

**We are the church**

The church can be described as a family.

Read [Ephesians 4:31-32](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=+Eph+4%3A31-32&version=NIV,NRSVUE) and [1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A27-13%3A13&version=NIV,NRSVUE)

**Discussion: How should members of a family treat each other? What is the most important ingredient that holds a family together?**

Read [1 Corinthians 12:12-26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A12-26&version=NIV,NRSVUE) on how the body of Christ functions

**Discussion: What parts of the body are mentioned in these verses? Do you think any part of your natural body is insignificant?**

**Discussion: Why are you so important to the body? How should members of the body of Christ treat one another?**

Leadership in the church. Read [1 Timothy 3:1-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+3%3A1-7&version=NIV,NRSVUE) and [1 Timothy 5: 17-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+5%3A+17-19&version=NIV,NRSVUE)

**Discussion: What qualities does the Bible request of leaders in the church? How are church members expected to treat overseers or leaders in the church?**

Reading [1 Timothy 5: 17-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+5%3A+17-19&version=NIV,NRSVUE) can be challenging

**Discussion: What claims and assumptions in the letter to Timothy make you feel uncomfortable and how do you deal with those? How do you think the Church’s understanding has changed and developed since its beginning?**

We all bring our own baggage, bias, hurts and prejudices with us to church. How can we accept, honour and value one another even though we have different experiences, upbringings and views?

Being the Church, one body, and there being no distinction between “Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free” ([Galatians 3:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A28&version=NIV,NRSVUE)),  we are all called to be active in our calling to work together for the overall good of the body of Christ, ([1 Corinthians 12:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A28&version=NIV,NRSVUE)), to live in harmony with each other and be like-minded ([Philippians 2:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A2&version=NIV,NRSVUE)), and to be productive in bearing fruit for Christ.

**Discussion: Will we grow in our knowledge and understanding of one another? Will we be open to learn and develop, deepening in love and appreciation of difference, to go beyond our own perspective or experience, and to cross divides?**

This involves having a curious, humble and generous attitude. The body of Christ is much more than a metaphor. We are called, gifted and commissioned – to reach out and to deepen and strengthen relationships in ways we have never imagined.

Diversity refers to the existence of variations of different characteristics in a group of people. These characteristics could be everything that makes us unique, such as our cognitive skills and personality traits, along with the things that shape our identity. Diversity is about recognising the benefits of different values, abilities, and perspectives, and celebrating people’s differences. This means promoting an environment that welcomes and values diverse backgrounds, thinking, skills and experience, and encouraging diversity means to actively respect, appreciate and empower people for who they are.

Martin Luther King Jr once pointed out that Sunday was the most segregated (or most homogenous) day of the week. With regard to racial reconciliation and diversity on Sunday mornings, not much has changed. The majority of churches clustering for their worship gatherings still remain primarily uniform, similar and alike. The real interpretation of [Galatians 3:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A28&version=NIV,NRSVUE) is not blindness to difference, but Paul encouraging Christians to see one another as equals, that we all (no matter what the cultural distinction) make up the body of Christ. Paul doesn’t call us to disregard our uniqueness. But he does remind us not to let what makes us special divide us as a Church.

**Becoming the Body of Christ**

Watch a video to prayerfully reflect on what it means to be the Body of Christ.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch/SExJ9od-0zQ?autoplay=1>

Watch a video to prayerfully reflect on the way we can quickly label others or be labelled ourselves by others.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/hNS_D-pw8y4?autoplay=1>

Consider [1 John 4:19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+john+4%3A16-21&version=NRSV) : “We love because he first loved us.”

**Discussion: How can we make the Church into a place where people come and they do not receive negative labels, but experience the love of God?**

**Closing questions:**

The learning in this session has been too personal to be checked using questions. However, here are some reflection questions, which hopefully capture the reflecting and learning you have done.

1. “The majority of believers are comfortable with the level (or lack) of diversity that exists in their church.” Ed Stetzer
	* Do you agree with this quote? Why?
2. What kinds of concerns or fears might church members have about encouraging wider diversity?
3. Can you think of a time or incident from your wide experience (home, school, work, church etc) that made you feel excluded?
	* How did you feel?
	* What could have been done differently so that you didn't feel excluded?
4. What could you and your church do to make it a more inclusive place, where everyone can be heard and all feel welcomed?

**Closing prayer:**

Great God,

You have created all of us so uniquely. You give us all spiritual gifts that help us to make up the body of the church.

Help us not to let common cultural divides tear us apart in the church. Remind us that we all belong to you.

In the same way, remind us to celebrate the differences and uniqueness of the body of the church and that you have called people of all backgrounds to share your Gospel and to share about the hope of salvation.

Amen.

**Session 4: What does the strategy recommend?**

**Aim of the session:**

Knowledge of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: a Methodist approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Objectives:

* Know and understand the basic content of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS)
* Know the tools for ensuring implementation of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion included within the JDS strategy
* Recognise the expectation that the JDS User Guide is to be used across the Methodist Church in Britain
* Be able to use the Methodist Church Equality Impact Assessment

**Opening prayer:**

Lord, we come to you when our hearts are filled with worries and when our burdens are heavy.

You give us strength no worldly creation could match.

You give us joy that reaches far down into our soul.

You give us a place where we are not rejected:

where your Spirit brings new life and pure wisdom;

where we feel included, safe and loved.

Help us to bring your inclusiveness into the world and to let all know about your goodness and love.

Amen.

 Chito

**Introduction:**

The Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity that was approved by Conference in 2021 aims to create “a profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodists Church so that all Methodists are able to be full participants in the Church’s life” and includes “mandatory actions for local churches, circuits, districts and the Methodist Council, designed to embed a culture of justice and respect for all” with the expectation that “each church, circuit, district, and the Methodist Council will use the same strategy for this work”.

This is a very far-reaching commitment.

The strategy is far more than just training.  It is thirty-seven pages long, of which less than half a page covers mandatory training.

There is also a User Guide, which covers the principles of the strategy.  The expectation is that this is to be used across the Methodist Church in Britain. There are also a series of new terms and names for processes included within the strategy.  The upcoming notes will explain these terms and processes, so that we are all familiar with them as they become embedded in our work in every area of the church.

**Affirmations scheme**

Recommendation 2 b) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for a scheme to capture good practice and acknowledge strengths within churches that are open and inclusive. Churches will outline what they do to ensure they are inclusive and develop plans for the future. These examples can then encourage others to also move forward.

Listen to what Deacon Ramona Samuel has to say about the Affirmations scheme.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/8eWO-R2IvjI?autoplay=1>

**Inclusive Language Guide**

Recommendation 2 c) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for a review of the language we use in communications and worship, both within the church and when we communicate externally. The aim is to avoid the use of language that is derogatory or marks people as different where this is not relevant, and instead use language that affirms the humanity and identity of all. The Inclusive Language Guide is published on the Methodist website.

Listen to what Revd Jill Marsh has to say about the Inclusive Language Guide.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/4FPaWfjO7ag?autoplay=1>

**Discrimination and Abuse Response Service**

Recommendation 4 a) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for a Discrimination and Abuse Response Service for people to disclose situations of discrimination or exclusion and be supported pastorally in deciding how to respond. The process will support and empower people through any decisions and actions that may be required to bring justice and healing, including restorative justice or a formal complaint if appropriate. The system will also allow instances of discrimination to be tracked, so that patterns can be identified and avoid being repeated.

There is also the Personal Responsibility Commitment. Although this can be used by any and all of us committed to our own learning, it can also be used so that people who have caused discrimination or exclusion can be supported to accept the situation, learn and change their behaviour in line with the expectations of a just and inclusive church.

In addition, the church will develop a Critical Incident Resource to provide support to those who need to respond to instances, so that there is a structured and consistent approach.

Listen to what Revd Farai-Mapamula has to say about the Discrimination and Abuse Response Service.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/LSG0JIp5WX8?autoplay=1>

**Truth and Reconciliation Process**

Recommendation 4 e) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for a Truth and Reconciliation process. This process will apply to a particular system or procedure within church life. The process will be to listen to those who have experienced discrimination, to acknowledge the injustices and failures within the system, and to transform systems and procedures in a way that brings healing and justice.

Listen to what Bevan Powell, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor, has to say about the Truth and Reconciliation process.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/FaEIJm_sT6Y?autoplay=1>

**Solidarity Circles**

Recommendation 4 f) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for Solidarity Circles with opportunities to meet. These will provide an opportunity for people in the church who share a particular characteristic to meet together. This will be a chance to support one another and to identify concerns that need to be addressed and can be raised with church leaders.

Listen to what Rachael Lowe and Nick Palfreyman from the ‘Living with Disability’ Solidarity Circle have to say about Solidarity Circles.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/jPJCgj3dbZ0?autoplay=1>

**Equality Impact Assessment**

Recommendation 4 f) of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity calls for an Equality Impact Assessment to audit and measure the impact of our activity and decision-making in any context. This will support adherence to the Church’s values and mandatory equality legislation.

Equality Impact Assessments are common across the public sector and many industries.

The Methodist Church’s assessment has been developed to be used within individual churches, as well as larger-scale projects. It is available on the Methodist Church website.

In the administration of the church, we have many structures and complete many tasks. These might be to do with staffing, or property, or communications, or paperwork. They may include reviews or audits.  Hopefully the Spirit is in all of our work. But not all of our actions are directly commissioned by the Bible.

An Equality Impact Assessment may feel like a piece of paperwork that comes from the professional world outside of the church.  Yet it has a Biblical commission.  In Acts chapter 6, the Greek widows complained that they were receiving less than the Hebrew widows. This led to the commissioning of Stephen -sometimes referred to as the first church steward- and six others to do the administrative work of the church. This freed up the disciples to focus on preaching the gospel. It was also to ensure that, within the early church community, there was equality and justice amongst different groups.

Assessing the work that we do, in order to ensure equality of impact, is part of our original Biblical commission to be the church of God. It is fundamental to the mission of the administrative elements of the church.

**Supplementary document: Having a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment available will be useful when viewing the following video.**

The Equality Impact Assessment is available online at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/equality-impact-assessment/>

Watch a video that shows an example discussion of how to complete the assessment.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/bIkcWU5Ym1Y?autoplay=1>

**Discussion: For which areas of the life of your church community do you need to complete an Equality Impact Assessment?**

**Closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

**Question 1:**

**What is the Truth and Reconciliation Process?**

* **A story of the history of racism and the Methodist Church**
* **A review of a system or procedure within the Methodist Church, to listen to those who have experienced discrimination, acknowledge failures and transform systems**
* **A restorative conversation between someone who has been discriminated against and the person who discriminated against them**

**Question 2:**

**If you wish to report discrimination in the Methodist Church, do you need to make a formal complaint?**

* **Yes**
* **No**

**Question 3:**

**Which of the following are possible advantages of completing an Equality Impact Assessment?**

* **You will be better able to correctly allocate resources, such as time and budget, to meet the aims of your project**
* **You will ensure you are catering to the needs of all**
* **You will identify changes you need to make to ensure your project does not inadvertently lead to indirect discrimination**
* **You will demonstrate to everyone, inside and outside the church, that you take equality and justice seriously, with actions as well as words**

**Question 4:**

**Is the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity all about fixing problems within the church?**

* **Yes**
* **Of course. Everything is terrible and must change now**
* **No. Whilst elements of the strategy are aimed at identifying and fixing problems, the Affirmations scheme is about recognising and celebrating positive experiences within the church, and helping others to follow those examples**

**Closing prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, you came into the world, took on flesh and lived among us.

You ate with sinners, healed foreigners, welcomed children, embraced outcasts and broke all sorts of rules in order to be a bridge rather than a wall.

Teach us to embrace the way you worked in the world: beyond the borders of religious tradition, social status, nationality and experience.

Show us how, time and again, your grace transcended and overflowed beyond expectations and boundaries.

Stretch our understanding of insiders and outsiders and reorient our sense of morality as you cleanse us from all self-righteousness.

Teach us to see our privileges as opportunities to serve the needs of others.

Make our hearts, homes, churches and society places of welcome and hospitality.

Amen.

 Sahr

**Answers to closing questions:**

Answer these questions to check that you have met the aims and objectives of this session:

Question 1:

What is the Truth and Reconciliation Process?

* A story of the history of racism and the Methodist Church
* A review of a system or procedure within the Methodist Church, to listen to those who have experienced discrimination, acknowledge failures and transform systems
* A restorative conversation between someone who has been discriminated against and the person who discriminated against them

Answer: A review of a system or procedure within the Methodist Church, to listen to those who have experienced discrimination, acknowledge failures and transform systems

Question 2:

If you wish to report discrimination in the Methodist Church, do you need to make a formal complaint?

* Yes
* No

Answer: No

Question 3:

Which of the following are possible advantages of completing an Equality Impact Assessment?

* You will be better able to correctly allocate resources, such as time and budget, to meet the aims of your project
* You will ensure you are catering to the needs of all
* You will identify changes you need to make to ensure your project does not inadvertently lead to indirect discrimination
* You will demonstrate to everyone, inside and outside the church, that you take equality and justice seriously, with actions as well as words

Answer: All are correct answers

Question 4:

Is the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity all about fixing problems within the church?

* Yes
* Of course. Everything is terrible and must change now
* No. Whilst elements of the strategy are aimed at identifying and fixing problems, the Affirmations scheme is about recognising and celebrating positive experiences within the church, and helping others to follow those examples

Answer: No. Whilst elements of the strategy are aimed at identifying and fixing problems, the Affirmations scheme is about recognising and celebrating positive experiences within the church, and helping others to follow those examples

**Session 5: Opportunities for Action. What next?**

**Aim of this session:**

Equipped for continuing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion learning beyond the EDI training module

Objectives:

* Be able to continue personal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion development through self-directed learning
* Know how to access professional training from external providers
* Be able to read, and learn from, professional training material from external sources, whilst remaining true to the gospel

**Opening prayer:**

Inviting God,

Help us to see that every person has a place in your presence.

Forgive us when we try to limit our friendships to people who look like us, act like us, believe like us.

Through your Holy and transforming Spirit, move us from exclusion to inclusion, from formulators of fences to builders of bridges, from indifference to all-encompassing love.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

Sonia

**Introduction:**

In this session we consider our own development and how we can get the learning and development that’s right for us.

**Critical thinking**

At the end of this session there will be a list of resources for further learning. These resources are drawn not just from The Methodist Church in Britain, but from a range of contexts; therefore it is important to be able to draw out valuable learning through engaging in a critical thinking and evaluation process. Someone with critical thinking skills can understand the links between ideas; determine the importance and relevance of arguments and ideas; recognise, build and appraise arguments; identify inconsistencies and errors in reasoning; approach problems in a consistent and systematic way; and reflect on the justification of their own assumptions, beliefs and values.

Critical thinking -taking time to closely consider, evaluate and assess- helps us to question and overcome our natural inclinations and biases. We may read, see or hear something which may contain valuable content or inspire us, but one single element of the content may distract us from the learning process and from benefitting from the broader valuable content. This kind of 'dissonant' element can make us resistant to incorporating new information and ideas, because our attention is focused on resolving a specific issue. There might be several reasons for this, including context, natural preferences, theological understanding, threat to our already established thinking.

In 2007, virtuoso violinist Joshua Bell went busking in an experiment to see if the public would recognise one of the finest talents in the classical music world. He posed as a street musician, dressed in a baseball cap and a long-sleeved T-shirt. He opened his violin case and took out his $3.5 million violin, threw a few dollars in the case to encourage others, as thousands of other street musicians have done before. He played for 45 minutes. Almost nobody stopped to listen. Was it because they didn’t like the music? Not likely. People all over the world pay more than $100 a seat to listen to Bell perform. They simply didn’t assign a lot of value to this “street musician”. In fact, out of 1,097 people that walked past Bell, only 27 gave any money and only seven actually stopped and listened for any length of time.

**Discussion: When have you missed out on an opportunity because of something that distracted you from appreciating everything that was there?**

Watch a video to reflect on how we can use critical thinking to continue to learn about equality, diversity and inclusion, despite having differences of theological conviction with one another.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/pBYp8Ke8YmU?autoplay=1>

**Discussion: How did you respond to the phrase “God made me disabled”? Did you experience a ‘jar’, either with the phrase, or with Geoff and Steff’s discomfort with the phrase? How did this affect you in learning from the video?**

**Personal Responsibility**

We have an opportunity to commit to a personal process of making Church a fully inclusive place. We can all be part of making this Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy so much more than a list of actions interspersed with a sprinkling of desired results. The reason that the Conference voted unanimously for this Strategy is because division is not just evident in the world, but also in the Church.

Watch a video to reflect on the importance of recognising personal responsibility.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/QlnM-YAKV0M?autoplay=1>

That video shows the importance of recognising personal responsibility for the things you can do, without necessarily taking total responsibility for a situation.  It may be true that others have a lot of responsibility for things that have happened, but we can expend a lot of energy focusing on that and not contributing to positive change. This is not good for our well-being and energy levels.

On the other hand, if we focus on ourselves when we do not have control, this can be negative for our mental health. For example, asking “What am I doing that is causing this?” when in fact it is being done to me. So we need to recognise where our thinking is, and focus our energy on those things that lead to positive change, enhance our well-being and energise us.

Share this prayer to focus on what we can do to bring change:

**God, grant us the Serenity to accept the things we cannot change,**

**the Courage to change the things we can,**

**and the Wisdom to know the difference.**

**Amen.**

**Discussion: When have you needed to focus on taking responsibility for what you can do, rather than focusing on what others could do? When have you needed to recognise that you do not have control over a situation and so should not feel responsibility?**

**The Methodist Church Personal Responsibility Commitment**

The Methodist Church recognises that all its members have much to receive, contribute and learn within the life of the local church community and that participation in the worship and fellowship of the Church enables faith to grow and develop.

Through the ‘Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity’ the Methodist Conference has committed:

* for the rich diversity of people within the Methodist Church to be recognised as a cause for thanksgiving, celebration and praise
* to eradicate all discrimination and coercive control within the Methodist Church, and for all people to be treated justly and with dignity across the breadth of the Methodist Church
* for a paradigm shift (a profound change) in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church so that all Methodists are able to be full participants in the Church’s life.

If the Church had a brand, what would this look like or say? It would certainly include the word ‘unity’. How does the Church model, stand for and fully embrace unity? How do we personally make sure that Church is so much more than a place, a body, an experience that just matches your expectations, perspectives, values, likes, dislikes, wishes, hopes and dreams, but is a place, for everyone to feel and know the all-encompassing love of God, a place where all are valued and respected?

In the Bible, God leaves no doubt of the tremendous value placed on every single human life. God's love for us is relentless, immeasurable, and infinite. The Church is to fully reflect God's heart and intention to bring all creation into the knowledge and experience of that love.

We can all help develop our ‘brand’, our calling, our hope! And we can help to champion it right where we are, adding our energy and personal resources and joining in co-creating real, visible and tangible unity. To do this will involve commitment across a number of areas of life. These are willpower; thoughts and focus; emotions; beliefs; decisions; vocabulary; prayer.

Signing up to a Personal Responsibility Commitment is the next step on the journey.

The purpose of Personal Responsibility Commitment is to:

* develop your own learning and development
* help you take personal responsibility in relation to matters of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity
* outline what you think your ‘gaps’ in skills or knowledge may be
* help you plan how to address these development needs
* ensure good collaboration and learning between yourself and the Methodist Church
* help the Methodist Church in our journey of change to being a Church of justice, dignity and solidarity.”

**Supplementary document: Having a copy of the Personal Responsibility Commitment will be useful for the next section of discussion.**

The Personal Responsibility Commitment is available online at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/personal-responsibility-commitment/>

Read these notes from an example Methodist Church Personal Responsibility Commitment:

I have noticed the following gap in my knowledge or skills:

*I have recognised that I have tended to group the people in my church who are from ethnic minorities together, whereas in fact they have very different stories and backgrounds and their national heritage is from different countries, and even continents. I don’t know much about these places and I am beginning to realise some of my assumptions about my friends have been over-simplistic or even wrong. I recognise some of my comments to them or questions, though meant in kindness, may actually have been quite tiresome for them, or even offensive.*

I aim to learn more by the following actions:

* + *Listen carefully to what my friends actually say, without assumptions*
	+ *Read and watch articles that explain the experience of those of ethnic minority heritage in the UK, especially in the church*

As a result of my learning I will…

*Be able to have conversations with those whose cultural background is different to mine, without assumptions, judgements or stereotypes.*

What personal testimony might I offer to share with the church?

*I would be happy to share my experience with others who are on the same journey of learning. If I find good books, articles and videos I will share them with others, just as some good resources have been shared with me.*

People or resources which may help me ….

* + *I watched a video called ‘Dear White Church (the British POC Experience)’ which really opened my eyes. I am going to seek out other videos, articles and books that can help me understand the experience of those of ethnic minority heritage in the church.*
	+ *Listening to my friends in the church can help me. I recognise that it is not their responsibility to educate me and I have no right to put that onto them, it is my responsibility to learn. However, I can be genuinely curious and interested in them as people, ask them open questions, listen carefully to what they say, and then speak about them and their heritage in the way they speak about themselves. So without asking them to educate me, I can learn by listening to them more carefully.*

**Discussion: How will this person’s Personal Responsibility Commitment help them relate to other people in their church community in fellowship and love?**

**Discussion: What areas for learning will you include in your Personal Responsibility Commitment?**

**Future opportunities**

The Methodist Church in Britain believes that by implementing the actions outlined in the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity we will ensure the Church is positioned to improve the experiences of all people and enable us to go well beyond legal compliance to the place we hope and believe for in our declaration ‘Your kingdom come your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Our commitments to equality diversity, and inclusion are ongoing, and we’re learning more every step of the way.

These study sessions have only been a part of our learning. Our commitment now is to continue learning about the diversity of God's people as part of our own personal development and discipleship, whether that be by using the Personal Responsibility Commitment or in another way. We cannot learn all we need to through these study sessions, but hopefully we have been energised and equipped to continue in our journey.

If you have a leadership role within the Methodist Church, you are responsible for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within your area of responsibility, including whatever learning and development you require in order to be able to meet that responsibility.

There are lots of opportunities within the church for further training, development and study.

* The Methodist Church EDI toolkit is here:  <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/>
* This page, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning-and-development/learning-network-regions/the-eastern-region/edi-resources/>, on one of the Learning Network pages of the Methodist Church website, contains links to lots of resources for further individual learning about a wide range of topics.  All of them have been recommended to the Methodist Church by people with experience in the relevant field.  Not all of these external resources will always share a Methodist ethos or theology.  However, that does not mean we cannot learn more about equality, discrimination and inclusion issues from reading these resources, and then apply that learning within church life, to better ensure justice, dignity and solidarity within our fellowship.
* Various training events are offered by the Learning Network. See <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning-and-development/learning-and-development-events/> for upcoming events.
* There is a self-directed online unconscious bias course you can enrol on here: <https://mcb.theologyx.com/course/unconscious-bias-training/>
* Positive Working Together is an excellent training course for positive communication, especially in times of transition, change and conflict, to prevent bullying and harassment. See:
* <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/training-in-positive-working-together/>
* [positive-working-together-short-report-0715.pdf (methodist.org.uk)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4290/positive-working-together-short-report-0715.pdf)
* The Church of England's Difference course is here: <https://difference.rln.global/>
* You can learn more about the Methodist Church's social justice conversation, Walking with Micah, here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/walking-with-micah/>
* Learning from Experts by Experience

One way we can learn is by listening to people who are experts on a particular issue because of their own lived experience.  However, we need to take care with this.  Just because someone has a particular characteristic, does not make it their responsibility to educate the rest of us on what life is like for them.  Also, different people with a shared characteristic will have different experiences.

One option is to organise an ‘Ask Me Anything’ session, in which an Expert by Experience agrees to respond to questions.  This provides a non-judgemental space for people to ask questions they might not be comfortable asking in other settings.  The Methodist Church has published guidance on how to do this in a sensitive, safe way, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/training-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity/run-an-ask-me-anything-session-with-an-expert-by-experience/>

* Sources of support:

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* Discrimination and Abuse Response Service: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/support/dars-discrimination-and-abuse-response-service/>
* EDI officers – you may have one in your Circuit or District, and could also contact the Connexional EDI team via equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk
* Pastoral support from local ministers
* Safeguarding officers in cases of abuse
* Counselling services
* HR
* District Lay Employment Secretaries

Learning and growth often occur when we share our thoughts with others. Having done this course, please discuss with others in your church, Circuit, District or team, whatever has inspired or challenged you. Through shared conversations, you could agree what changes need to happen where you are, and how such change might be brought about.

**Closing question:**

**What will you do next to continue to learn about the diversity of human life experience and how to ensure justice within our church community?**

**Closing prayer:**

Most generous God, in your borderless kingdom all creation finds its home.

We thank you for your gracious and unconditional invitation to be part of your body.

Help us to pay attention to those whose voices are too weak to be heard and to those who live in the forgotten corners of our world.

We pray for all those who are excluded from the richness of your creation.

Help us to follow the movement of your Holy Spirit, ever reaching into the margins of our lives and communities.

Amen.

Paul