



**GOD'S MISSION OUR MISSION: "WARM HEARTS, TOUGH HANDS AND WET FEET – MARKS OF OUR WHOLE-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP"**

**1. WHY DO WE NEED TO REFLECT ON GOD'S CALL TO MISSION?**

1.1. The President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev. Dr. Heather Morris, at the special Conference of the Church in 2013, described Methodists as those who have "a *warm heart*, for everything stems from a living relationship with Jesus; *tough hands*, because they serve; and *wet feet*, because when God leads we will step out, take risks, be uncomfortable for the sake of God's kingdom." This is a memorable description of whole-life discipleship which challenges the Connexion to reflect upon the current context of our Church: **are we 'wandering in a wilderness' because we have lost sight of God's invitation to His people to move into His Promised Future?**

1.2. Holy Scripture reveals God's design to gather humanity and all of creation into communion under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Church is to serve this Promised Future by helping human beings to know Jesus Christ and to become His effective and fruitful disciples – thus achieving the purpose for which they were created- and to mature as disciples *by participating in bringing in the reign of Jesus Christ as God's new society*. The characteristics of God's new society are delineated in Scripture especially in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. As John Stott observes in his commentary on Ephesians:

"It sets forth God's eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society which stands out in bright relief against the sombre background of the old world. For God's new society is characterised by life in place of death, by unity and reconciliation in place of division and alienation, by the wholesome standards of righteousness in place of the corruption of wickedness, by love and peace in the place of hatred and strife, and by unremitting conflict with evil in place of a flabby compromise with it."<sup>i</sup>

1.3. **Are we, in the Methodist Church in Ireland, 'wandering in a wilderness' because we have not fully grasped the gracious invitation of God to His people? If so, it is vital that we reflect more profoundly on our motivation for mission.** Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ are 'a people invited to follow' Him in God's transformative mission: to 'follow Him' requires individual and collective growth until 'Christ is formed in us' (Gal.4:19). **Why should comfortable well-off Christians, bother?** The prime reason is that the one living God *wills* to be known through us throughout His whole creation. He *wills* to be known because the good of God's human creatures *requires* that His Love be known to them. The good of the whole creation *requires* that God be known and praised as its Creator. (Romans 8:19-32). Knowing God to be God is the supreme good and blessing for human beings made as we are in God's image: as John Wesley emphasised refusing or suppressing that knowledge lies at the root of all other kinds of sin. (Romans 1:18-32).

1.4. Therefore, **the flourishing of human beings and their societies depends upon the Church of Jesus Christ seeking to fulfil The Great Commission. (Matt.28:16-20).** If we have the joy of the Gospel filling our hearts and lives because we have encountered Jesus personally and have accepted His offer of salvation then we have been set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. This joy we have in Christ and the love of Christ compels us to share our new life in Christ with all people.

If Jesus is really Lord for us we have no liberty to opt out or be half-hearted in our response to His gracious command. We are to make known the God of love, justice,



compassion, truth, integrity, faithfulness and sovereign power if we are to be true to our calling and election. (1 Peter 1:3-10). As Christopher J. H. Wright observes:

“ ... all our missional efforts to make God known must be set within the prior framework of God’s own will to be known. We are seeking to accomplish what God himself wills to happen. This is both humbling and reassuring. It is humbling inasmuch as it reminds us that all our efforts would be in vain but for God’s determination to be known. We are neither the initiators of the mission of making God known to the nations nor does it lie in our power to decide how the task will be accomplished or when it may be deemed to be complete. But it is also reassuring. For we know that behind all our fumbling efforts and inadequate communication stands the supreme will of the living God, reaching out in loving self-revelation, incredibly willing to open blind eyes and reveal his glory through the treasures of the gospel delivered in the clay pots of his witnesses. (2 Cor.4:1-7).”<sup>ii</sup>

- 1.5. **The mission of the Methodist Church must be understood within the mission of God as we discover it in Holy Scripture.** Fundamentally our mission – if it is Biblically informed and validated- consists of our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.<sup>iii</sup> The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself at the very centre of this community. (Ephesians 2:9-22; 3:10). Increasingly God’s mission is understood as ‘one mission’, that is no longer are certain parts of the world termed ‘the mission field’ different from ‘home missions’: all mission is local mission wherever it happens. We need to incorporate ‘one mission’ thinking into every aspect of the life of the Church. Mission today throughout the world is a **partnership** of local churches which learn from each other, resource each other, challenge each other.<sup>iv</sup> Jesus announced His Mission ‘to preach the gospel to the poor’, ‘to heal the broken-hearted’, ‘to preach deliverance to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind’, and ‘to set at liberty those who are oppressed’ and these key elements must shape our mission undertaken in His Name too. (Luke 4: 17-21: the key missionary text in Holy Scripture.) Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ’s ultimate concern and mission. (John 10:10). A keynote of Jesus’s mission might be said to be that of ‘mission from the margins’: God chose the poor, the foolish and the powerless (1 Cor. 1: 18-31) to further His mission of love, justice and peace so that life may flourish: ‘mission *from* the margins’ rather than ‘mission *to* the margins’ is so important for Western Churches which seek to serve God “in a world in which faith in mammon threatens the credibility of the gospel.”<sup>v</sup>

The Bible traces the formation of God’s Holy People from creation all the way to the new heaven and the new earth. (Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21). We affirm that mission begins with God’s act of creation and continues in re-creation, by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, poured out in tongues of fire at Pentecost, fills our hearts and makes us into the Church of Jesus Christ. The Spirit which was in Jesus of Nazareth inspires us to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style and accompanies God’s people as we seek to bear witness to the love of God in word and deed. The Holy Spirit leads into all truth and empowers us to defy the demonic powers and speak the truth in love.

It is important for us seek to grasp the vast scope of the mission of God as revealed in Holy Scripture in order to **enlarge our vision** and respond appropriately to God’s invitation and to read the ‘signs of our times’.

- 1.6. As Wright has noted:

“There are many ordinary and worthy Christians whose personal piety relishes those Scriptures that speak to them of their own salvation and security, that encourage them in times of distress, that guide them in their efforts to walk before the Lord in ways that please him. But it comes as a surprise for them to be confronted with such



an array of texts that challenge them in relation to God's universal purpose for the world and the nations, the multicultural essence of the gospel and the missional essence of the church. *But they need to get over their surprise and hear the burden of the Bible.*<sup>vi</sup>

Therefore what may be at stake is the effective relationship of the Methodist Church in Ireland with the essence of the message of Scripture: **are we being faithful to God's mission as set forth in Holy Scripture?** The Bible is our primary rule of faith and practice and we read the Scriptures unapologetically through the lens provided by the Risen Jesus Christ. (Luke 24:44-48.) We, as witnesses to Jesus, live in His Resurrection world. We marvel at God's love and His invitation to us, through Jesus Christ, to participate in this new creation as new creatures in Christ.<sup>vii</sup> The implications of this invitation and of what it implies concerning discipleship are profoundly revolutionary in all of contexts we may find ourselves participating in God's mission. If we have been guilty of an 'individualistic spirituality' we need to repent: we cannot be right with God and not be on mission to our neighbour and to the world. Mission spirituality is always transformative for it resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics and even in our churches. It has been well said that the Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning: if the Church does not engage in mission it ceases to be the Church.

1.7. The Methodist Church in Ireland claims and cherishes its place in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ "finds its origin in the mission of God for the saving transformation of the world."<sup>viii</sup> It is in this endeavour to be faithful to God's Word and to His mission that our Wesleyan doctrinal emphases are so pertinent: it is not that any particular emphasis is exclusively the property of Methodism but that God has raised up a movement in His Church that, when missionally effective, combines a number of vital aspects of the Christian faith which are necessary for His whole Church. We briefly note here these emphases as our special heritage in the Christian faith and as our particular contribution to the whole Church – *what God is calling us to share with all people as we participate in His mission.* To fulfil God's missionary purpose is the aim of the Church.

1.8. It has become fashionable to discuss the 'DNA' of Methodism as we ask the question what is in our spiritual 'genes' that will help us now to be more fruitful in our discipleship as we seek to fulfil God's mission in our twenty-first century contexts? These 'genes' have been summarised as follows:

*"Methodist DNA is to be  
PRAYERFULLY TOGETHER a people of:  
PERSONAL HOLINESS-for each person to grow as a disciple of Jesus  
COURAGEOUS EVANGELISM – for people to speak boldly the news that Jesus  
loves and died for all  
COMPASSIONATE SOCIAL ACTION –for churches to serve vulnerable people in  
their communities"*

Another identification of our 'genes' lists:

**Scriptural holiness, Spiritual discipline, Accountable fellowship, Transformative worship, Personal service, Evangelistic witness.**<sup>ix</sup>

The fruit of practising our faith as determined by these 'genes' will be 'warm hearts', 'tough hands' and 'wet feet': in effect what has been termed 'whole-life discipleship'.<sup>x</sup> The concept of 'whole-life discipleship' is one where disciples engage in mission wherever they are every day – at the 'frontlines' of everyday life and the local worshipping and nurturing church fully supports and equips such discipleship shaped by and for comprehensive mission: such an understanding provides a rich underpinning for how we might seek to fulfil our mission at local society and District levels in particular but also as a whole Connexion. The key to our appropriation of a Wesleyan contribution to mission is John Wesley's Sermon, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation'.<sup>xi</sup>



Salvation for Wesley is not 'the going to heaven, eternal happiness' – a blessing which 'lies on the other side of death'– it is 'a present thing' – ' a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of' and which consists of a *journey* commencing with deliverance from the *penalty* of sin and going on progressively to deliver from the *plague* of sin in the Christian's life and onwards to deliverance from the very *presence* of sin and its effects. This gradual therapeutic transformation of our lives – sanctification-has been captured by Albert Outler as understanding salvation as a journey from the barely human, to the truly human, to the fully human. Underpinning this journey is prevenient, justifying and sanctifying and perfecting grace which requires *our co-operation* in the spiritual means of grace (spiritual disciplines). In his Sermon, 'On the Working Out Of Our Own Salvation', Wesley states:

"All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as a 'grain of mustard seed, which at first is the least of all seeds, but' gradually 'puts forth large branches', and becomes a great tree; till in another instant the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we 'grow up in all things into him that is our head', 'till we attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'.<sup>xii</sup>

This 'Scripture Way of Salvation' is powerfully determinative of how we ought to approach 'whole-life discipleship' formation whereby we become effective and fruitful in undertaking God's mission in our everyday contexts.

## 2. WARM HEARTS : JOY IN THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

2.1. John Wesley's 'heart-warming' experience on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738, has led Methodist people to describe themselves as a people with 'warm hearts'. This does not mean a people who avoid thinking or delving deeply into Scripture and theology. It does mean we are people who allow experience to aid our understanding of what God is saying to us. In his Preface to the standards sermons, Wesley writes, "I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental [experiential] religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not." Indeed Wesley's theology has been described as a "theology of love" which encapsulates both the idea of the heart and the head, in understanding Scripture, in hearing God's invitation and in discerning His will for His world. **We are called to be a people who joy in the Gospel of Love.**

2.2. Wesley's theology of prevenient grace is a key element in Wesleyan theology which is most relevant to God's mission. We find God's grace already at work in the world as we seek to follow Jesus as His disciples. In his sermon Free Grace Wesley states:

" Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all; that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and with Him freely giveth us all things. But it is free for ALL, as well as in ALL."

Therefore we do not dismiss anyone, nor do we declare anyone beyond God's grace and redeeming love. As Charles Wesley wrote in the well-loved hymn, 'And Can it be':

He left His Father's throne above  
So free, so infinite His grace-  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race:  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For O my God, it found out me!"

Methodism has rightly been called "a discipleship movement shaped for mission".<sup>xiii</sup> We are discovering and re-discovering that each local society in the Methodist Church must



be a means and a centre for the formation of effective disciples: half-hearted semi-detached attendance by so many from time to time at worship services is a situation demanding radical change. The call to Holy Living is not an option: it is a Scriptural imperative. (1 Peter 1:13-2:10; 2 Peter 1:3-11.) Paul comments that he is “in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed” in the Galatian disciples (Gal. 4:19) and we must share this painful and costly loving yearning for each person to become mature disciples.

Personal and social holiness require to be seen as aspects of the one phenomenon: John Wesley had a passion for the needs of the whole person and stated that there was no holiness that was not social holiness.<sup>xiv</sup> He frequently described holiness as the ‘renewal of the whole image of God’ in each person and this Scriptural Holiness entails changing whatever in our political, economic or social contexts which diminish or hinder the full flourishing of every human being. His opposition to slavery is the classic instance of John Wesley’s time when he responded to the Scriptural requirement of just relationships and the need to convey God’s love for all of humankind. All disciples are to pursue ‘entire sanctification’ in their Christian lives. Methodists are always aware that they are not anything like they should be in Christ but they ought to be on the way to the goal of entire sanctification or ‘perfect love’ by the transforming grace of God. The divine purpose is the restoration of humanity to fullness of life: this provides both the direction and hope of our lives. As Runyon observes “what makes Wesley’s theology distinctive is his ability to hold together in a working union two fundamentally important factors in the Christian life that have often been disconnected” – the renewal of our relationship with God (justification) and the living out of this relation (sanctification), neither of which is possible apart from the other:

“Through the Spirit’s communication God intends that persons actually sense divine affirmation and love, and actually participate in conscious fellowship with their Creator...should not the church convincingly proclaim it, inviting persons to ground their lives in that which not only can comfort and sustain but can place us in the context of God’s continuing renewal of the whole creation? For the divine acceptance given in justification overflows to include the vocation and calling to sanctification, to the perfecting of all things. Salvation consists, therefore, not only in reconciliation but in service, not only in an experienced sense of God’s reality and presence but in a life lived out of that reality, extending divine transforming power into every aspect of both individual and social existence.”<sup>xv</sup>

Such ‘faith expressing itself through love’ (Gal.5:6) explains our commitment to social justice. This yearning for right relationships between all God’s people is based upon the character of God and his requirements as revealed in Holy Scripture. This costly personal and collective witness should be the hall-mark of the work of the Methodist Church and of each local society. We start from the *perfection of God’s love* as we receive it from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. We do not focus on our own perfection but on the perfection of *that which we receive: there is no more ultimate, more complete, more holy love, more self-giving love than that which is directed at us by God.*

This love is sheer grace, and it is the love that God shares with those called to be in God’s image. We receive and participate in perfect love. We are invited to reflect and share this perfect love in the world as we fulfil our vocation: our sanctifying is linked to and directed toward the sanctifying of the world. The affirmation that wills the good of the other and which readily sacrifices for the other abhors whatever is destructive of persons, or society, or the good earth. God’s love is therefore a *critical principle* and provides the basis for the prophetic role of the church and of discipleship. We mobilise for God’s mission to seek “gracious re-creation of both individuals and the social world through the renewal of the image of God in humanity” – our doctrine of perfect love “holds out the promise that through the transforming energy of divine love reflected into the world the future can indeed surpass the present.”<sup>xvi</sup>



### 3. TOUGH HANDS: A DISCIPLESHIP MOVEMENT SHAPED FOR MISSION.

- 3.1. In order to participate effectively, as God's people, in God's mission, we must engage in lifelong learning and lifelong practice in mission as disciples of Jesus Christ. John Wesley described the character of a Methodist:

"A Methodist is one who has the Love of God shed abroad in His heart, by the Holy Spirit given unto him: One who loves the Lord His God with all his heart and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire but Thee! My God and my All! Thou are the Strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'"<sup>xvii</sup>

Significantly Wesley goes on to stress *our active responses* to the love and joy which characterises the Methodist disciple: prayer, assurance, love of neighbour, purity of heart and obedience to the will of God:

"Lastly, as he has time, he does good unto all men; unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. And that in every possible kind, not only to their bodies, by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison; but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth; to awaken those that sleep in death, to bring those who are awakened to the atoning Blood, that being justified by faith, they may have Peace with God, to abound more in Love and good works. And he is willing to spend and be spent herein, even to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith so they may all come unto the Measure of the Stature of the fullness of Christ."<sup>xviii</sup>

- 3.2. To meet this Wesleyan demanding characterisation of our discipleship whereby we develop 'tough hands' will require 'tough minds': being 'transformed by the renewal of our minds' is key if we are not to be 'conformed any longer to the pattern of this world.' (Romans 12: 1-2). Given the renewed focus on Wesleyan theology and spirituality in recent decades which is providing a solid foundation and focus for missional effectiveness Irish Methodists too must learn 'to love the Lord with all their minds'. Effective mission is 'mindful' not 'mindless'.

- 3.3. Our Wesleyan heritage offers some distinctive points of emphasis for considering how a missional church reflects on its own structure. *The Missional Nature of the Circuit*-developed by the Methodist Church in Britain- helpfully states that Methodist ecclesiology, while having much in common with that of other Christian Churches, has some distinctive emphases:

"These are essentially threefold: first, an emphasis on 'relatedness' as essential to the concept of 'church', finding expression in the 'the connexional principle'; second, an emphasis, stemming from Methodism's societal past, on fellowship and shared discipline, exercised through small groups, and third, the conviction that the Church should be structured for mission, and able to respond pragmatically, when needs or opportunities arise."<sup>xix</sup>

Our Circuits have the missionary task of sharing in the whole ministry of Christ- in their neighbourhoods through worship, teaching, mission, service, social action, and pastoral care within the whole community which lives in the Circuit area. The Circuit system ought to make it possible to deploy resources for mission on a wider basis than our existing local societies: these may be, at present, too focussed upon the maintenance of inherited church buildings and, therefore, not flexible enough for mission today. **Methodists are called to be a *movement* not an institution.**

Our Methodist history and spiritual heritage encourages experimentation, diversity and flexibility supported by a *methodical approach* to planning and analysing the missional



context so *that we go where we are most needed*: we are called to engage in, and focus upon God's mission not to strive to preserve existing and often declining local church buildings. We use an 'action-reflection' methodology as mission-shaped disciples. Local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission: led by the Holy Spirit they are impelled to step out of their comfort zones and cross boundaries for the sake of the mission of God.

- 3.4. The challenge for each local Society is to identify what is preventing us from being the kind of people Wesley and the President describes and that God is inviting us to be. God is offering to empower us to be effective disciples through the Holy Spirit. *Why are we not 'in step with the Holy Spirit'*? If we are 'in step' with the Holy Spirit the fruit of the Holy Spirit will be experienced and evidenced in our lives and witness: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal.5:22-25). This is the Scriptural bench-mark that each local Society has to use when developing a range of opportunities for discipleship formation. At the special Conference 'four shifts' were suggested:
- *Make disciples who seek growth in God's love*
  - *Make disciples who use the spiritual disciplines as a means of grace*
  - *Make disciples who share fellowship in the pursuit of God*
  - *Make disciples who engage in mission in daily life.*
- 3.5. If these shifts are necessary how might they alter and change what local societies of Methodists do to ensure such discipleship formation is taking place and that each person in the society is growing as a disciple? It seems that God is now calling us to develop a new template for local church development by discovering the principles and practices which characterised early Methodism but which now need to be developed in a twenty-first century context.

A new focus on the 'Local Church Whole-Life Mission Field' may be helpful in drawing renewed attention on discipleship at the frontline: through the life of our local churches or local societies **we need to learn how to grow disciples who live as missionary followers of Jesus in all of life**. This involves embracing the mission opportunities afforded by members' daily contexts- their 'frontlines'- and equipping them to use such opportunities. The challenge of leading a church into 'whole-life' mission is substantial in our current and traditional context where 'mission' may be understood as either what happens in and around church buildings or on the international scene. A change from the present 'minister-centric model' of 'mission' towards a new model of equipping lay disciples to be missionary in their own daily contexts is required.<sup>xx</sup>

- 3.6. As a Church we appear to have become seriously discontented with 'half-hearted discipleship' and with inward-looking, self-centred local church congregations. There is an urgent need for 'repentance', in the sense of a determination to 'turn to God' and seek His forgiveness for wasted opportunities in the past because of our complacency; we need to pray for the empowering of His Holy Spirit for more effective discipleship in the future. Conference has already sought that each local church provides a new statement of its mission. There is now urgency in the provision of new approaches to every member development and to challenge each person to participate in discipleship growth through well-planned group-work at all stages of their Christian lives and witness. We need to remember that it is not 'shepherds' that produces 'sheep'- 'sheep' produce 'sheep': *we must recover Methodism as a lay-centred contagious movement.*<sup>xxi</sup>

One model which might be helpful in regard to the necessary change process at local church level has six essential elements if the desire is to move towards a 'whole-life discipling' church:



1. **Cast a whole-life vision – use Scripture as a missionary text to a missionary people**
  2. **Focus on the frontline- where people in the church spend most of their time and where they have most contact with non-Christians**
  3. **Develop the Minister-People Contract –the primary role of ministers is to lead and to facilitate equipping and discipling so that each person grasps their primary identity is that of a disciple of Jesus in the whole of their lives**
  4. **Grow a Core Team- develop a small core group to create and sustain momentum for discipling and mission**
  5. **Make One-Degree Shifts- making small but strategically important changes, for example regular testimonies from the frontline in services or short ‘This Time Tomorrow’ slots in services where folk can seek support and prayer for their mission opportunities**
  6. **Share Stories- how the prayers, conversations, acts of compassion and truth-telling have met with responses and show where God has already been working in so many situations<sup>xxii</sup>**
- 3.7. The Methodist Church in Ireland has formed an organisational partnership with the Inspire Movement.<sup>xxiii</sup> The vision of Inspire is to develop the spiritual life of mission-shaped disciples who abide deeply with God and live missionally in the world: to help ordinary Christians understand mission as a way of life, rooted in the love of God and neighbour. The Inspire ‘way of life’ has four ingredients:
- **Seeking Growth** in the love of God and neighbour, as Jesus-shaped and Spirit-filled disciples
  - **Using Disciplines** of prayer, Holy Scripture, Holy Communion, fasting and service as a means of grace, for growth in love of God and neighbour
  - **Sharing fellowship** in small groups called ‘bands’ to help one another grow in God’s love and grace
  - **Engaging mission** by sharing God’s love with others in word and deed.

The practice of fellowship bands, which are life-transforming groups of three or four people meeting regularly for mutual support, the exercise of mutual accountability and group spiritual direction to help one another discern God’s presence and leading is a crucial recovery of a key ‘gene’ of Wesleyan spirituality. Inspire promotes a ‘rhythm of discipleship’ involving *reflecting* on our daily walk with God, *relating* in fellowship bands, and *responding* to God’s lead in daily life.

- 3.8. *We have to be honest before God.* Methodists, like other Christians, can opt for a comfortable cocoon: the world around us is desperately in need of our effective witness but we may focus complacently on the irrelevant or even the idolatrous: we are thrilled to hear good, sound preaching, we believe in the doctrines of God and even the Kingdom of God but in our daily lives such may have very little consequence as we remain indistinguishable from everyone else in our secular culture. Indeed some of us know that holiness is a beautiful thing – and even read about it in books and maybe admire it in others- but we feel it is impossible for us to be holy and thus ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in our daily lives. Instead we conform to the world and offer God an hour on Sunday.

Maybe we dread personal sacrifice and shrink from self-denial: the satanic pressures to keep up with the world as it is wins out. We may have a horror of our acquaintances, family or ‘friends’ considering us narrow-minded or having ‘got religion’ and ‘carried





away'. Others in their pietistic fervour insist on some favourite theological 'test' and are so fundamentalist about it that many are thereby kept from hearing the Good News. **It is from such a 'wandering in the wilderness' that we believe God is inviting us as His People to forsake and to enter into His Promised Future.**

- 3.9. Local societies, **firstly**, must become fellowships where people first of all find the support and help to do battle with besetting sins – ignorance of God's Word, laziness, bad temper, excessive self-concern, vanity, impatience and so forth – and where they are helped to win through to personal transformation in Christ – not to settle for "Well, that's just the way I am". The spiritual disciplines are required to be developed and used to help in this aspect of discipleship formation.<sup>xxiv</sup> A widespread transformation of character through wisely disciplined discipleship to Christ can transform our world. There is a revival of small-group discipleship-making in local churches and this is an imperative for our future mission-effectiveness.<sup>xxv</sup> Classes and bands should not be confused with traditional Bible-study groups which impart information and doctrine and these have a valuable place in a learning church. Classes and bands, however, are focussed on the development, growth and accountability of each disciple as they seek to live out their 'whole-life' discipleship.

**Secondly**, the context for mission which surrounds each local Methodist Society must be studied and examined so that disciples will seek to discern God's will in their own situation and to address the mission needs. In doing so disciples will 'learn by doing' and require classes, 'bands', Bible study groups, prayer groups and inspiring preaching and worship to relate what they are learning, by serving as missionary disciples, to God's Word. Our churches need to grow in healthful discipleship more than simply in size. Through such 'means of grace' we gain the 'strength to love', to use Martin Luther King Jr's phrase, so essential given the rampant individualistic and consumerist economic and social context in which we live. Radical and prophetic responses are required if God's reign of love and justice is to be our standard for Christian behaviour.

- 3.10. A mission statement for each local society needs to reflect the following overall purpose however it may be couched in local societies:

*'Our mission is to make whole-life disciples who seek growth, use the spiritual disciplines, share fellowship and engage in God's mission to transform our world'*

There is an imperative to become a listening and discerning local fellowship, 'hearkening to the voice of the Lord' utilising the Wesleyan Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience framework for theological reflection in the context of continual prayer. New approaches to Biblical understanding, such as Lectio Divina, might be profitably employed where disciples are enabled to 'listen and hear' what God may be saying to them.<sup>xxvi</sup> We need in the words of the President, Dr. Heather Morris:

"To be a people formed in the power of the Spirit who clearly see the cost of discipleship and who choose to be disciples."

#### **4. 'WET FEET' – THE CONTEXT FOR MISSION IN IRELAND**

- 4.1. The rapidly changing contexts in which our mission takes place in the twenty-first century requires careful and detailed analysis. Indeed it is the rapidly changing contexts of Ireland, North and South, which warrants this new Statement. We live in a world undergoing constant change. We live in a time when the prevailing ideas which govern the shape of living for so many is dominated by materialism – either through greed for more by the better off or through lack of the materials required for flourishing living by the poorer sections of society. Inequality in the distribution of wealth and income has grown remarkably in the last thirty to forty years in the Western world dominated as it is by markets –especially the financial markets- and by competition in which the weaker



- 4.2. sections of society suffer most. It is true that standards of living for many are better than in previous generations but this has been accompanied by a deep-seated individualism trumping social solidarity in many areas of life. This situation is accompanied by many signs of spiritual impoverishment. Amongst such signs are the growing depression and mental illness in our society and indeed levels of suicide. Increased affluence for many is accompanied by the great stress which is placed on *personal freedom* and much less stress on the need for commitment to others. In our prevailing neo-liberal culture - one in which markets are seen as the prime mechanism for most human interactions the things that money cannot buy are diminished.<sup>xxvii</sup> **The role of the Church in forming the moral context for flourishing human living is an underdeveloped one but it is now an urgent task.**

Many people are 'imprisoned' in a privatised world which is more and more facilitated by the new digital age: lives are more fragmented and complex as links with family, churches and communities have or are being lost for so many. Once accepted patterns of marriage and family structures are now far less common. The secular culture and society which prevails in the Western world is, in Ireland, also an embittered culture in respect of Christianity. The embitterment stems in large part from the gross crimes of child abuse and other related misdeeds by those representing the Christian churches; the long years of violent strife on the island – represented for many the negative influence of Catholicism and Protestantism which appeared to lend cover and to support warring communities. Trust has rapidly declined and not only in relation to Christian Churches but also due the Great Recession since 2008 in political institutions and in banks and other social institutions.

These and other characteristics of the new social, economic and political context for mission require more attention from our Church so that our analysis can bring to bear a Biblical perspective and therefore lay a basis for an effective evangelisation in the future. It is important that each local congregation is led by the Holy Spirit to assess and respond to their own changing contextual realities. We need to learn how to bring our faith more readily into dialogue with the wider culture in which we now live: the onus is on us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to take a lead and to create the intellectual space in which Christian belief and behaviour can be taken seriously again.

Rev. Dr. Richard Clutterbuck, in an important paper, has begun to address the particular context in Ireland where so many find Christianity incredible for moral and spiritual reasons more often than other places where atheism purports to be based on rational, scientific fact. He points to value of a Wesleyan evidential understanding of the Christian life – evidence drawn from the witness of the Spirit and the evidence of holy living in such a context. If we are prepared to listen and to have a dialogical engagement with non-Christians then a conversation may occur that enables the Christian to commend the faith. This has credibility when there is the evidence of the assured, sanctified and fruitful Christian life: 'the best apologetics is personal and social holiness'; this **our missional opportunity**: to be local Christian communities "with the confident humility to share their Christian experience and to exhibit the kind of holy living the presence of which makes Christianity credible and the absence of which makes it unbelievable."<sup>xxviii</sup>

- 4.3. A Biblical perspective will shine a searing light on the idolatry which pervades all of the issues noted briefly above. We are called to 'turn to God from idols and to serve the living and true God' (I Thess. 1:9). Secular society is now worshipping 'Human Constructs' and we are discovering that even the greatest human achievements cannot solve the deepest human problems. Amongst the 'Human Constructs' that is now



worshipped in society – that is ascribed the highest worth- are Mammon – in the form of the often out of control financial markets- which national and indeed supernatural bodies are unable to control or direct towards human development goals. As the Psalmist notes “All the gods of the nations are idols” (Ps. 96:5). We who live in such a context as Christians have great difficulty in unmasking the idols; we, too, have been led to worship them in daily life and indeed to make many sacrifices to appease them. We need, as Martin Luther King Jr. observed in a famous sermon ‘tough minds’.<sup>xxx</sup> Paul counsels us:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ...Having disarmed the powers and authorities [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross.” (Col.2: 8, 15).

Isaiah declares this ‘Day of the Lord’:

“The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled;  
The Lord alone will be exalted in that day, and the idols will totally disappear”  
(Isaiah 2:17-18).

**4.4. Idolatry is a prime missional issue.** As disciples of Jesus Christ we reject the human claim that human beings alone have the sovereign right to define for ourselves good and evil: this claim is the source of human pride and sin and the root of all other forms of idolatry. The mission of God is to restore His whole creation to worship Him in His good creation ruled over by a redeemed humanity, giving glory and praise to its Creator. One example might be given: the failure to tackle effectively climate –change by so many people and their governments. This is at root a spiritual problem- the former environmental advisor to President Carter and President Clinton, James Gustave Speth, has said:

“I used to think that the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation and we scientists don’t know how to do that.”<sup>xxx</sup>

In our time we are invited to participate in this Divine Mission in anticipation of its final accomplishment. We need to work to engage and expose the idols which distort, demean and diminish our humanity. This will involve our Church and all disciples to engage with issues of human rights, inequality between social groups and individuals, poverty, the rights of women, the environment as well as challenges of secularism and religious pluralism. John Wesley understood God’s goal as the transformation of this present age, restoring health and holiness to God’s creation. As Runyon observes:

“For Wesley religion is not humanity’s means of escape to a more tolerable heavenly realm but participation in God’s own redemptive enterprise, God’s new creation, ‘faith working by love’, bringing holiness and happiness to all the earth. But this inevitably means confronting the injustices of the present age.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

The idols always disappoint and always fail. We need to be available to bring blessing into damaged human lives by deep compassion for those oppressed by forces of evil, modelling our behaviour and response on Christ. We are called to be prophetic in the public square.

*We need Christian apologetics and theological argument securely based on the Biblical perspectives for the ‘public square’; we need evangelistic engagement [ here St. Paul at Lystra, Athens and Ephesus provides Scriptural models for engaging with non-Christians and false gods ( Acts 14:8-20;17:16-34;19:23-41); we need pastoral programmes to build mature Christian communities who are enabled to think Biblically and with ‘tough minds’ address the ethical issues in our surrounding culture and we need prophetic warning concerning idol worship both to God’s people and to the hurting wider human society.*



## 5. WARMING HEARTS, TOUGHENING HANDS AND WETTING FEET.

- 5.1. As Methodists we must ever remember that we are a people of God, His new Israel, and we are a people of the New Covenant. Our annual Covenant Service provides the solemn occasion when we are invited to reflect upon our discipleship together as a Christian community and to renew together our Covenant. It is strongly recommended that **God's Mission Our Mission** be studied and used as part of the preparation for the Annual Covenant Service to assist in the re-examination of the nature of God's gracious invitation to each person who loves the Lord Jesus and who wishes to serve Him.

As the Methodist Church in Ireland seeks to discern the direction in which God is calling us in the period ahead the following questions may be helpful:

1. As a worshipping community, what do we have to celebrate and lament?
2. As a hospitable community, who are we called to welcome?
3. As a prophetic community, what are we commanded to affirm or challenge?
4. As a witnessing community, what stories do we have to tell?
5. As a serving community, how do we express Christ's love for the poor?
6. As a holy community, how do we reflect the goodness, truth and beauty of God?
7. As a pilgrim community, what boundaries are we called to cross?
8. As a learning community, to whom do we need to listen?

The process of prayerful discernment and reflection, centred upon the phrase 'A People invited to follow', has already identified a number of 'seeding' actions or developments that may make the mission of the Methodist Church in Ireland more effective in the light of God's calling to us for the next stage of our journey as a Connexion. These 'seeding' actions are additional to major decisions already approved by Conference which have a bearing on our mission. Many mission related developments are already underway. Deepening the Covenant with the Church of Ireland and enriching our ecumenical relationships with other Christian Churches will give rise to historic opportunities for Christian witness and more effective mission in the period ahead. Conference has approved a new process for the training and development of Local Preachers which aims to increase the effectiveness of our preaching and of our worship in the years to come. Conference is also seeking to put in place a new Board of Ministry which will embrace both ordained and lay ministries. The 'Hope and History' project is supported as we, with others, seek the reconciliation of memories and to work with all those who have injured or suffered grievous loss through violence: we seek to make God's love and forgiveness known and to exemplify such in our discipleship.

- 5.2. 'Seeding' actions or proposals which, building upon the growing prayer and renewal movement in our Church led by the Holy Spirit, include:
- Further 'risk-taking' in pioneer mission projects such as the Surf ministry and new local societies being formed in various parts of Ireland
  - The central place of individual and corporate prayer has begun to be very widely acknowledged in local church outreach and development
  - Our social responsibilities as Christian disciples have always been considered and expressed through the Council for Social Responsibility – there is increasing awareness that every disciple has a social responsibility to witness to the values of God's Kingdom and to speak out prophetically and to act when these values are at stake in relation to issues such as economic and social inequalities, poverty, consumerism, the need for healthcare, human trafficking, medical ethics and so forth. We are called to oppose anything which is offensive to God and which hinders human flourishing



- Recapturing the 'band system', as for example in the Inspire Movement, noted above, and the need for small fellowship groups and supports to assist more effective and accountable discipleship
- Taking a public stand on issues in 'the public square' so that all forms of media in the digital age are used to witness to the Gospel and to challenge an often aggressive atheism: Christian apologetics has been discerned as a neglected area of mission.

5.3. It may be helpful, in summary, to use the **Five Marks of Mission** as an easily remembered format to ensure overall balance in mission and as a tool to assess mission at local level:

- To proclaim the good news of the kingdom **TELL**
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers **TEACH**
- To respond to human need by loving service **TEND**
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society **TRANSFORM**
- To safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth **TREASURE**<sup>xxxii</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION: HEARING THE MUSIC OF GOD'S FUTURE AND DANCING TO IT TODAY.

6.1. It has been well said that "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't."<sup>xxxiii</sup> Praise and worship of the Lord is the dominant reality of the new creation.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Today the worship and praise of the Church energises us for mission: as we worship God we hear the music of God's future as assured by the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and by His grace we are empowered to dance to it now. We rejoice that Methodism was born in song and we joyfully enter in this heritage of vibrant worship and inspiring Biblical preaching. As a people invited to follow our missionary God we are called to the great adventure of whole-life discipleship in which we grow in Christ as we participate every day in God's mission where ever each one of us are placed. Our worship is our first priority and our finest service to God is to put God first in our lives: if this is not the case then our mission must fail:

"Sing to the Lord a new song,  
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;  
Proclaim his salvation day after day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
His marvellous deeds among all peoples." (Psalm 96:1-3).

### **With the Psalmist we pray:**

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
And make his face shine upon us,  
That your ways may be known on earth,  
Your salvation among all nations.  
May the peoples praise you, O God:  
May all the peoples praise you.... (Psalm 67:1-3).



### **Our prayer**

*God, loving guide, graciously, and at such cost,  
You offer an invitation to all to follow you.  
Stir, we pray, in every heart a longing for you:  
Grant us discernment that we may recognise your direction;  
Grant us courage that we may step out and follow;  
Grant us deep trust in you, loving God,  
The One who holds and promises never to abandon us.  
As we follow You, Lord God, we pray  
That in the power of Your Spirit,  
You will illumine your people with Your light,  
That You will form the lives of those who commit to you,  
That every aspect of our lives together will point to Jesus  
And that your people will be a blessing to many. Amen*

*Rev. Dr. Heather Morris, President, Methodist Church in Ireland.<sup>xxxv</sup>*

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- <sup>i</sup> See John Stott, **The Message of Ephesians God's New Society**, (The Bible Speaks Today, InterVarsity Press, Second Edition with Study Guide, 1991) pp9-10.
- <sup>ii</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, **The Mission of God Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative** (IVP, Nottingham, 2006), pp.129-130.
- <sup>iii</sup> This understanding is very clearly set out Wright's **The Mission of God Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative**, op.cit.
- <sup>iv</sup> See **Future Mission Together**, Report to Methodist Church in Britain, 2012, and **Report of the Methodist Missionary Society Working Party** to Methodist Church in Britain Conference, 2013.
- <sup>v</sup> See **Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes A New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism**, ( WCC, Geneva, 2012) par.7.
- <sup>vi</sup> See **The Mission of God**, op. cit., p.36.(italics added).
- <sup>vii</sup> This is clearly the essence of Wesleyan theology and for a full treatment of this understanding see Theodore Runyon's **The New Creation John Wesley's Theology Today** ( Abingdon Press, Nashville,1998).
- <sup>viii</sup> See **The Church Towards A Common Vision** Faith and Order Paper, No. 214, (WCC, 2013) p.2.
- <sup>ix</sup> See **'The DNA of a People Invited to Follow** ( Leaflet of Home Mission Department, Methodist Church in Ireland, 2013) and Philip Meadows, **The Wesleyan DNA of Discipleship Fresh Expressions of Discipleship for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church**, (Grove Books, Cambridge, 2013); see also 'The Genius of Methodism', The 2013 Pastoral Address to Methodist Church in Ireland based in part on Bishop Ken Good's Address, September 2012, in Portadown.
- <sup>x</sup> See Tracy Cotterell and Neil Hudson, **Leading a Whole-life Disciplemaking Church**, ( Grove Books, Cambridge, 2012).
- <sup>xi</sup> See 'The Scripture Way of Salvation', in **John Wesley's Sermons An Anthology**, eds. A. Outler and R.P. Heitzenrater, (Abington Press, Nashville, 1991) pp.351-380; this Sermon is described by the editors as the "most successful summary of the Wesleyan vision of the 'way of salvation' in the entire sermon corpus".
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid,p.489.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Rev. Dr.Martyn Atkins, **Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission**, A Summary of the General Secretary's Report to the Methodist Conference 2011; [www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf).
- <sup>xiv</sup> "Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems" in **The Works of John Wesley, A.M.**, ed. John Emory, Vol.7 (New York, 1831) p.593.
- <sup>xv</sup> See Runyon, op.cit., 'Conclusion Rethinking Sanctification', pp.222-223 and pp.222-233 for whole discussion.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Runyon, p.231.
- <sup>xvii</sup> John Wesley, **The Character of a Methodist**, The Seventh Edition, (London MDCCLI) ;reprint for John Wesley's Chapel London.p.4; modernised capitalisation and 'Spirit' for 'Ghost'.



<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>xix</sup> Faith and Order Committee, **The Missional Nature of the Circuit**, par 4.7.1; on line [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) accessed 15 February, 2013.

<sup>xx</sup> See Cotterell and Hudson, op.cit., for illustrations of such an approach; further helpful studies include A. Hirsch and L. Ford, **Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People**, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2011); T. Chester and S. Timmis, **Everyday Church** (IVP, Nottingham, 2011); M. Horton, **The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples**, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2011); N. Hudson, **Imagine Church**, (IVP, Nottingham, 2012) and John Pritchard **Living Faithfully Following Christ in Everyday Life**, (SPCK, London, 2013).

<sup>xxi</sup> See George G. Hunter III, **The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement**, (Abington Press, Nashville, 2011).

<sup>xxii</sup> See Cotterell and Hudson, op.cit., pp.15-24 for further elaboration on these six elements.

<sup>xxiii</sup> For details see [www.inspiremovement.org](http://www.inspiremovement.org)

<sup>xxiv</sup> See Dallas Willard **The Spirit of the Disciplines Understanding How God Changes Lives** ( Hodder & Stoughton London, 1988) for one accessible treatment of the spiritual disciplines.

<sup>xxv</sup> See, for examples, Kevin M. Watson, **The Class Meeting Reclaiming a Forgotten ( And Essential) Small Group Experience**, ( Seedbed Publishing, [www.seedbed.com](http://www.seedbed.com) , 2013) and the work of Inspire noted above.

<sup>xxvi</sup> There are a number of aids and books seeking to introduce Lectio Divina see, for example, Karl A. Schultz, **How to Pray With the Bible The Ancient Prayer Form of Lectio Divina Made Simple**, (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Huntington, IN, 2007).

<sup>xxvii</sup> See work of leading political philosopher Michael J. Sandel, **What Money Can't Buy The Moral Limits of Markets**, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2012) for important analysis of our context for mission.

<sup>xxviii</sup> R. Clutterbuck, 'A Reason to Believe: How does Wesleyan Theological Tradition Contribute to a Contemporary Defence of Christian Faith?', Paper to the Thirtieth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 2013.

<sup>xxix</sup> See 'A Tough Mind and A Tender Heart', in **Strength to Love**, ( Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2010), pp.1-9.

<sup>xxx</sup> Quoted in **Working Notes Facts and Analysis of Social and Economic Issues**, Issue 72, October, 2013, 'Editorial' p.2 in issue devoted to Protecting the Environment; (published by Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice, Dublin).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Runyon, op. cit., pp.171-2; Runyon's chapter 'Wesley for Today' is a clear presentation concerning these issues confronting both the Church and our society.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The Five Marks of Mission were endorsed by the Lambeth Conference in 1988 and the Forum of Churches Together in England in 1997.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> John Piper, **Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions**, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 1993) p. 17.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> See the important work of systematic theology by the Methodist theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright, entitled **Doxology The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life**, ( Oxford University Press, New York, 1980).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Prayer taken from **Light and Hope For Methodists in Britain and Ireland**, Prayer Handbook 2013/2014 (Methodist Publishing for the Methodist Churches in Britain and Ireland, Peterborough, 2013) , p.15.