

District Grants Committee: Strategic Development Areas for Grant Making

1. Introduction

This document attempts to identify some grant funding priority areas in the Darlington District related to the District Strategic Plan ('...every church growing') and wider developments in the connexion, particularly the New Places for New Places strategy.

The District Policy Committee at its meeting on 14 October 2020 identified 6 priority work streams to support the District Plan:

- Oversight and Trusteeship – supporting circuits as they restructure governance and trusteeship and develop sustainable business plans for the medium term.
- New Places for New People – in the first instance developing a district project with the potential for replication around the district and then supporting circuits as they develop their own projects. In particular, given the socio-economic profile of the district, there is a focus on developing churches at the margins.
- Growing Discipleship – support for small groups and the Methodist Way of Life.
- Digital Ministry – supporting circuits in developing digital ministry and social media presence.
- Supporting Ministry – supporting ministries both lay and ordained but including a commitment to the development of a local lay pastor scheme.
- Witness in the Public Square – partnership ecumenically and globally and action for justice including a particular focus on climate change.

There are three particular work streams which would benefit from strategic support from either the District Advance Fund or the District Training Fund:

- New Places for New People
- Digital Ministry
- Supporting Ministry

2. Funding Assumptions

It is clear that the impact of the pandemic will have a significant impact upon the finances of the Methodist Church at every level of church life. The District Advance Fund (DAF) is funded from two sources: a percentage each year 'top sliced' from Circuit Model Trust Funds; an annual contribution from the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF). Both of these sources are likely to be under pressure at least in the short term with circuits drawing down reserves impacting the amounts available for the DAF and the CPF under pressure to support funding for other areas of church life (e.g. support for pension funds). On the other hand, it is also possible that the closure of some churches may result in the medium term in increased sales of buildings and a growth both in model trust and CPF reserves. We simply do not know. At this stage it is probably better to plan at a lower level of estimates for annual spend of the DAF (c. £100,000 p.a.) over a 3-5 year period and to focus the spend on areas of high strategic priority. The District Training Fund is a separate fund which is now managed by the District Treasurer and overseen by the District Grants Committee. There is a significant balance in the fund.

3. Strategic Use of the District Training Fund

There has not been a significant call on the use of this fund in recent years. In addition to current areas of spending (e.g. supporting ministers or lay people taking a course), the following areas would benefit from support for learning and development:

- New Places for New People (NPNP) – one dimension of the developing district project plan focuses on the creation of a pioneer community of practice in the Darlington District. This will be supported by the Learning Network and the District Evangelism Enabler and there are a number of courses available which are funded centrally by the connexion. For example, we currently have 2 people on a pioneer coaching course and two circuit leadership teams on a Transformational Leadership programme. However, it would seem sensible to anticipate support for courses in continuing development (e.g. a Cliff College course on pioneering). This should not have a major impact on the Training Fund overall.
- Digital Ministry – there are a number of providers (e.g. Digital Church Toolkit - [Digital Church Toolkit](#)) which provide training modules in social media and practical tools for digital ministry (e.g. how to video edit) at relatively low cost (c. £50-60 a module). It would seem sensible to use the Training Fund in supporting circuits to identify and meet some of their key training needs in these areas.
- Supporting Ministry – one of the key developments in this area is the creation of a District Local Lay Pastor Scheme, part of which will include a learning and development programme over two years involving monthly seminars and a residential retreat each year. We hope to pilot this in 2021-22 and have asked the Wesley Study Centre to provide a quote to deliver the programme alongside contributions from the district and the Learning Network. It is difficult to quantify cost at this stage in advance of a quote but c. £3000 p.a. would not seem an unreasonable amount to budget for.

4. Strategic Use of the District Advance Fund

- a) **Staffing Posts** – the district has benefitted enormously from DAF funding for staff posts. There has also been significant support from connexional funds for the creation of a District Evangelism Enabler post – there will need to be planning to support this post once connexional funding has been used up if we decide that we wish to continue this role in the longer term (i.e. after the initial 5 years of funding). At the same time there need to be limits to the amount of posts created by the district – indeed there are arguments about using DAF funding to support existing posts. There are, however, two distinct areas where support via staffing might be particularly helpful at this stage:

i) Digital Ministry Enabler

The past year has seen a significant change in our perceptions of the value of our digital and social media presence. The district has also benefitted from having a connexionally funded ONE Programme intern (Liddy Buswell) working in the district for 2020-21 undertaking digital research with a particular focus on the digital presence of local churches and circuits. Given the transitional stage we are now in as we develop new models of church which combine both face to face and digital meeting and digital forms of communication, it would make sense to provide investment in a short term (c. 3 year role) to support local churches and circuits in developing their digital ministries. One possibility would be to create a 15

hours a week role at £9600 p.a. plus on costs funded either from one year's DAF funding or on an annual basis through the fund.

ii) New Places for New People: Coach/Mentor/Advisor

It has become clear during discussions of the NPNP/Church at the Margins project that the allocation of mentoring and coaching time from an experienced practitioner/church planter will be key to the success of new pioneers and to circuits as they consider potential projects. This does not necessarily require a significant amount of time. However, there needs to be adequate time set aside from other duties to ensure that this happens. One possibility is to create room for 1 day a week for this role – it is essential that such a role should be undertaken by someone who continues in work as a practitioner whose experience of church planting remains current. Benchmarked against the cost of a stipend might suggest an allocation of £9-10,000 p.a. either funded on an annual basis or by taking up a larger portion of a year's allocation to fund a 3-5 year period.

b) New Places for New People/Church at the Margins

New Places for New People (NPNP) is a strand of the Evangelism and Growth Strategy adopted by the 2020 Conference. The Conference committed itself to providing grant funding to support a number of different kinds of NPNP including what are known as *Churches at the Margins* – new churches within marginalised communities and deprived areas. These projects will not be fully funded by the connexion but will involve partnership funding between the connexion and districts and, as appropriate, with circuits. Because of the impact of the pandemic on connexional funds we do not at this stage know what level of funds will be available in connexional grants to support this work. However, the Darlington District has been selected within the first group of districts to take this work forward. It is a multi-faceted project which will involve, for example, advocacy and a learning and development programme. At its heart, however, is the intention to create new places and new disciples which could, for example, be in completely new premises, no premises at all, or be a replant into an existing base. We have identified two key projects which offer potential learning for the district as a whole. @SixEightNine is a potential community based project in a deprived area of Hartlepool on the old Westbourne Methodist Church site. It has one of the largest BB companies in the North East. Hope4East Cleveland is a project designed to plant a new church community in East Cleveland emerging from work which the DAF has previously part funded amongst children, young people and families.

The budget and project plan for these projects are still being formed. In addition, the hope is that these two projects will form the start of a number of further projects in partnership with circuits. It is difficult to fully estimate costs at this stage. However, it is clear that we will need to demonstrate a commitment to investment in this area if we are to attract both connexional funding and potentially funding from other grant bodies. I suggest, therefore, that it would be prudent to allocate c. **£60,000 p.a.** towards a new District NPNP Fund held within the DAF and overseen by the District Grants Committee.

**Revd Richard Andrew
12 February 2021**