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‘Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously ... for God loves a cheerful giver.’ 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

A year 6 class asked me; “Do you get paid?” “Yes.” “What for?”

An excellent question. After some thought I replied; “I get paid for being me.”

This is at the heart of a Stipend: *‘an amount of money that is paid regularly to somebody, especially a priest, as wages or money to live on.’* Oxford English Dictionary.

I have been asked to write about ‘The Circuit Assessment’ by several people, so here goes.

The Circuit Assessment is the primary responsibility of each Church/Chapel, even before maintenance in their church/chapel! In the Constitutional Practice of the Methodist Church [CPD] the Circuit is the primary place of mission and it is the Circuit Meeting, who appoint Circuit Stewards who oversee all activities in the Circuit including oversight of each church/chapel. The Assessment pays for these functions to be facilitated and, usually, this is done through the appointment of Presbyters to the Circuit for Pastoral Oversight and for Deacons who will engage in community and church missional activities alongside Presbyters and the Lay people in each church/chapel.

The appointment of Presbyters and Deacons to a Circuit is part of the ‘Covenant Relationship’ – Moses, (10 Commandments) Abraham, (Circumcision) Noah (Rainbow) all had Covenants with God and Jeremiah foresaw a new Covenant that finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ – this relationship between the Methodist Church and its clergy is a lifelong commitment that sees Ordained Presbyters and Deacons enter into Supernumerary status still under the discipline of the Methodist Church, whereby a pension is paid. This is not *employment*, there is no contract other than a ‘Letter of Understanding’, but a Covenant Relationship.

The majority of a Circuit Assessment is a confirmation of this Covenant Relationship. From September there will be 4 Presbyters (Neil Stacey, Alison Crookes, Claire Rawlinson and myself) and 2 Deacons (Suzie Sale and Michaela Docherty). The Assessment from each Church/Chapel contributes to the stipend for each of these and for housing costs; part of this Covenant Relationship is to provide housing including paying for certain expenses e.g. Council Tax, Water Rates, Broadband, whilst excluding others such as heating and lighting which falls upon the Minister.

In addition, the Circuit Assessment contributes to the pension funds that support our faithful Supernumeraries, many of whom having given most of the lives to the service of God through the Methodist Church. As I left a Circuit a woman said to me; “Gordon, it has been lovely having you as a Minister, one thing’s for sure, the next one won’t be as good as you.” “Thank you,” I replied, “but how do you know?” “Well, you’re the seventh I’ve met and they have all got progressively worse!” Our Supernumeraries and all of your former Ministers are precious.

The Circuit Assessment also contributes to the wider Connexion with a portion of the Circuit allocated budget going to District and Connexional level.

The Circuit Assessment spreads across into the world church and home mission through grants and, as I am reminded of by a precious member of one of our Churches, to well thought through projects that bless people in as diverse places as Botswana and Birkenhead.

The generosity of the Methodist people stretches so far beyond our local Church it is a joy to be able to write this. Caring for an active 'Minister' is an awesome responsibility our Circuit Stewards exercise in a wonderful way. One Minister, with stipend, housing costs, pension contributions, District grants, Connexional grants incurs a cost to a Circuit of about £50K a year. Not that the individual Minister receives this! It includes manse costs, insurances, mileage, levies to District and Connexion and other running costs to the Circuit. That is quite a commitment, and our Circuit Stewards do a wonderful job of overseeing this, alongside the needs of the Circuit and the care of our precious Ministers.

Thank you ... *God loves a cheerful giver.*

We, as a Circuit Leadership Team, are grateful that we can use this generosity at this time. Having 6 active Ministers sharing ministry across the Circuit will, probably, be as good as it gets for a while. As I once heard in a Church Council; 'The Methodist Church will run out of people long before it runs out of money.' We live in challenging times for the Christian Church in the UK, and we are all aware of our 'aging profile' and challenges we face in recruiting Office Holders in the local church, let alone outreach and missional intent that draws 'new' people into faith.

Our aim, as a Circuit, as a Methodist Church, as Christians together, our hope, our collaboration, our prayers are to make Disciples of Jesus Christ and for this Methodist movement, alongside our cherished Ecumenical partners, to be a continued catalyst for change in society seeking justice for all and for God's kingdom to come on earth as it does in heaven.

We continue together, Lay and Ordained, Disciples on our journey into the heart of the loving Holy Trinity, in Covenant together, sharing our gifts, graces, time and money. *May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day ... may I run the race before me ... looking only unto Jesus as onwards we go.*

Gordon

I hope to continue these letters month by month. This topic was inspired by people asking about the 'Circuit Assessment.' It is actually good news that we have this to pay as we can tangibly know that God continues to bless his/her people, and that we are still alive and kicking above our weight. Church continues to be a central part of many communities. We had a 'Community Service' at Frodsham and 12 different people spoke about community activities taking place *in* the Church. The next one will have even more people talking about community activities in the community undertaken by members of the Church. God is good! And continues to work his purposes out. Hallelujah!

If anyone has any stories/news to share please do let me know and may Almighty God bless us all through this warm August.