

## 48. Managing Trustees of the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

<b>Contact name and details</b>	The Revd Nigel Cowgill Chair of the Managing Trustees nigel@methodistlondon.org.uk
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### Introduction

This report from the Managing Trustees gives an overview of the varied activities and events that have been part of the life of Methodist Central Hall Westminster during 2021-22. Sunday morning in-person services resumed in the summer of 2021 following the lifting of lockdown restrictions due to the pandemic, and successful online services were moved earlier to 9.30 am. In-person evening services then returned in September 2021, which was also when bookings began to recommence for our Conference and Events business. Whilst the Hall was in debt by £3.3 million as of 31 August 2021 and the future is going to be challenging, both the level of enquiries and actual event bookings are a source of hope. The Trust has been self-financing since its establishment in 1994 and has not sought any financial support from the Connexion in this time.

### Ministry of the Church

76 years ago, as the world recovered from the trauma of the Second World War, the United Nations chose Methodist Central Hall Westminster (MCHW) to be the venue for the first meeting of its General Assembly. In 1946 the congregation had to vacate the building so that the UN could move in, marking the first time when we could not hold weekly church services in our Great Hall. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world, we again had to leave our building, not so that the world could move in, but as it turned out, so that we could move out into the world. Like many churches, the last two years saw MCHW needing to react to the pandemic and take a series of rapid steps that ultimately led to us reaching nearly seven million people to date. Our mchw.live platform has now opened up our work to serve the Connexion and World Church as well as catering for our own members and regular worshippers. MCHW's vision is to be a '*Global Christian Family Following Jesus at the Heart of London.*' Little did we know how prophetic this was and it has helped our local congregation to have a better grasp of what it means to be a 'Cathedral for Methodism'. We now have people regularly involved in our worship from Australia, Sri Lanka, India, Sicily, West Africa, Germany, etc, some of whom are joining Bible studies and fellowship groups.

The Church staff team consists of the Revd Tony Miles (Superintendent Minister), the Revd Lansford Penn-Timothy, Deacon Ali McMillan, and several other staff (including the Directors of Music) and Associate Ministers. Those previously on furlough returned in September 2021. The ministers are loyally supported by church officers and other volunteers in carrying out a diverse range of tasks. Despite the pandemic, church membership now stands at 408, which should increase after forthcoming membership classes. The role of our Pastoral Leaders has provided invaluable assistance to the pastoral care offered by the ministerial team. Our five cultural fellowship groups provide a splendid source of support, using WhatsApp groups to keep in touch with their members.

We continue to maintain good relations with Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, and other churches in Westminster. We work with and support The Passage (helping homeless people in Westminster). Moreover, despite MCHW reducing the grant to the St Vincent's Family Project (SVFP) that is hosted on our premises, the work of the project has continued with the help of income from other sources.

The Revd Tony Miles was invited to participate in a number of national events at the Abbey, including the Commonwealth Service and a Service of Thanksgiving for the life of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. He also preached at St. Margaret's Church at the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the terror attacks on Westminster Bridge and New Palace Yard. This service was well attended by the families of the victims and the Prime Minister was also in attendance.

MCHW was able to host the Parliamentary Covenant Service in our Great Hall this year. Many of our other regular activities and events are now gradually returning, including our Christmas Broadcast services on Premier Christian Radio, Daffodil Day, and The Healing Conference. MCHW's Alpha Course, Lent Course, and Bible Studies were all on Zoom.

The Trust's grant to the Church remains reduced by 50% (around £130K per year). The Church continues to accommodate this from its contingency fund. Despite the challenges, when we have stepped out in faith, our testimony is that God is gracious and faithful.

## **The Conference Centre**

Mr Paul Southern, who has acted as Managing Director of the Conference Centre (CHW) for 11 years, has stood down from his position as Managing Director to focus on family and other interests. A new brand for the national network of conference venues, called Central Hall Venues (CHV) was launched last year and the Directors have taken the opportunity to reshape the management structure, appointing a Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Financial Officer to focus on delivery of organisational strategy and growth. We are pleased that we have been able to appoint from within, ensuring continuity of culture and respect for our values and ethics. The new executive director team have 30 years' experience between them in the events and conference industry at senior and Board levels and are led by Sarah Ainsworth as Chief Executive.

The year to 31 August 2021 was challenging for the organisation, with limited revenues in the pandemic. Costs were controlled through a variety of measures including hibernation of the building, staff redundancies and furlough grants received. We are pleased to report that clients are returning now that Plan B restrictions have been lifted and the forecast for the current financial year to 31 August 2022 is for a revenue of £5.5 million – approximately 60% of pre pandemic levels. CHV now supports three Methodist venues in building management and commercial operations and are in discussion with other Methodist properties nationally with a view to providing similar support or advice. We anticipate revenues rising further in 2022-23.

## **Financial Situation**

Taking the Trust and its trading subsidiary CHW Ltd combined, we had net borrowings of £3.3 million at 31 August 2021, which has remained substantially at that level since then. We have agreed bank facilities up to £4 million, predominantly with HSBC, who have a strong and supportive relationship with the Methodist Church. Prior to the pandemic, the business was generating around £500K surplus per year for the use of the Trust, so it is anticipated that this level of debt can be paid back over time.

## **The Building**

The latest quinquennial inspection report was received in April 2022. We are pleased that the building 'is well maintained and is in good condition', and we are continuing a programme of proactive maintenance, but keeping capital expenditure restricted due to financial constraints. Inevitably there is work to be done and a comprehensive maintenance programme is scheduled for future years. All the items marked as requiring urgent attention are planned to be completed in 2022/23.

We have carefully managed the balance between using our internal facilities team and contractors, both through lockdown and since the return of worshippers and clients in September 2021. To their credit, Central Hall remains fully compliant with all health & safety, building and environmental regulations. During the year the gas water heater boilers were replaced with electrical heating boilers, thereby reducing our carbon dioxide emissions.

## The Trustees

The Chair of the Trustees is held by one of the Chairs of the London District. The Revd Michaela Youngson held this office until 31 August 2021 and was succeeded by the Revd Nigel Cowgill in September 2021. The Nominations Committee continues to work to ensure that the Trustee body includes committed individuals with relevant skills and experience, particularly in the areas of finance, legal affairs, heritage architecture and Methodist mission, along with appropriate diversity in its membership. In negotiating loans and overdrafts, the Trustees have found their current structure as a Charitable Trust to give complexity in terms of avoiding personal liability. We are looking to bring a firm proposal in the future to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

## The Future

[MCHW.live](#) continues to serve a flourishing online congregation. The ongoing community engagement of the Church demonstrates a Methodist commitment to an outward oriented mission, with God's love at its heart. The Trustees work collaboratively with both Church and Company to ensure the future viability of Methodist Central Hall Westminster in providing a beacon of Methodist Christian mission and presence at the heart of London. Our aim is to remain self-sufficient financially, but we are dependent on the success of our Conference and Events business.

## \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**48/1. The Conference adopted the Report.**

**48/2. The Conference appointed the following Managing Trustees of the Conference Property at Central Hall Westminster:**

The Revd Nigel Cowgill (Chair of the Managing Trustees and Convenor – ex officio)

The Revd Anthony D Miles (Superintendent, London Westminster – ex officio)

Mr Nevil Tomlinson (Treasurer to the Trustees)

Mr Bala Gnanapragasam (Secretary to the Trustees)

\* Mrs Ama Ackah-Yensu

# Mr Kojo Amoah-Arko

Mr Joseph Anoom

Ms Ruby Beech

\* Mr Michael Davies

Mr Alan Eccles

Mr Martin Lougher

\* The Revd Lansford Penn-Timity

\* Mr Wesley Gibbs

Dr Joanna Williamson

*\* Indicates the people nominated by the Westminster Circuit Meeting.*

*# Indicates Trustees who have served for six years or more*

## Reasoned Statements for Trustees who have exceeded six years of service

**Mr Kojo Amoah-Arko** – Chartered Accountant – provides valued financial input.

## New Trustees

**Mr Bala Gnanapragasam** – a Past Vice-President of Conference with extensive business and charitable experience.