

## Ethos Presentation

Slide 1: This school is a Methodist School. What does that mean? How does that get lived out in our life together as a school community? How a school feels...it's ethos is extremely important. It should set the stamp on everything that is done everyday. It should effect every conversation, every interaction with every person who comes into contact with us. It's about how we teach, do our business, deal with each other - pupils, parents, staff. Getting the ethos right doesn't just happen and it's the responsibility of everyone in the school community to be ethos holders - ethos doers - but particularly those who have positions of leadership.

Slide 2: An Anglican lead inspector was once heard to say to a Methodist colleague, 'There is something about your schools. It's difficult to put my finger on exactly what it is, but I know it when I experience it - and it's good. It's positive. There is a way of being that you see in Methodist Schools.' Another response would be to say - 'well exactly what is Methodism? What does it stand for? What is its' relevance?'

Slide 3: It could be said that Methodist Schools are places where we attempt to be the crack where the light gets in. In a world where relationships, the spiritual nature of life, questions of purpose and meaning easily get pushed to one side by the latest tweet, selfie, or 'like' on Facebook - we need places where young people are given the space and the opportunity to think about bigger issues, wider purpose, gentler and kinder ways of being.

Slide 4: So where does a Methodist identity fit into all of this? If you were to ask most people what they know or understand about the Methodist church - if they were able to give you an answer at all it might be - 'Methodists - aren't they the ones who don't agree with drinking and gambling?'. We need to get to a place that is more positive than that!

Slide 5: John Wesley himself said that there were 'no distinguishing marks of a Methodist'. That's not quite true, of course. He was trying to maintain the Methodist group within the Church of England and was keen that it not be seen as a different church.

Slide 6: Let's just think a little about the world that Methodism was born into. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist Church and his life conveniently spans almost the whole of the 1700s. Queen Anne - the last of the Stuarts died early in John's life so the world he grew up in was Hanoverian - the 'Georges'. It was a period of huge colonial expansion - the East India Company. It was a period of expansion in America, the revolutionary war was won and the Declaration of Independence was written. It was a period of big new ideas and ways of understanding the world - the intellectual enlightenment and the agricultural and industrial revolutions.

Slide 7: And just to give you a visual of Aidan Turner - it was the period of Poldark. Indeed the Methodist expansion in Cornwall is one of the elements of the Poldark story.

Slide 8: And it was in this world in 1738 that John Wesley had what has later come to be described as his 'heart warming' experience. He was in his 30s and had been a clergyman for a number of years but was feeling increasingly uneasy with the faith that he was trying to share. He was in the middle of his own spiritual crisis when on May 24th, 1738 at a house group meeting, he had a spiritual experience which was to change him for ever. He had found a faith in God which worked for him (read quote).

Slide 9: Within months of that initial experience he had, for the first time, preached outdoors because in some places ordinary parish churches were closed to him. Over the next 50 years he was to travel an estimated 250,000 miles on horse back up and down the length and breadth of the country and preach something like 42,000 sermons. Leaving behind him effectively a fully functioning new denomination.

Slide 10: It is extraordinary to see the impact of one person's life. Amongst other things Wesley opened the first school for miner's children, the first permanent free clinic in London. He was a vociferous supporter of the anti-slavery movement (his last letter was to William Wilberforce encouraging him in his work). He was so forward thinking that he allowed not only lay men but lay women to preach, and whilst he earned an enormous amount from publications he died with virtually no money - he had given it all away. Nowadays the Methodist Church has a worldwide family of around 80 million people - with Churches, schools, hospitals and universities. In the UK the Methodist Church has around 90 schools with 25,000 children attending. In MHA (Methodist Homes for the Aged) it has the U.K.'s largest faith based elderly care charity, Action for Children works with vulnerable children and their families and All We Can works with some of the world's poorest communities.

Slide 11: So what are the indicators? The markers of Methodism today?

- \* A belief that the love of God is transformative - of lives, of relationships, of the world. People can and do change.
- \* A key part of the early Methodist philosophy was that Methodists are responsible for each other. 'We watch over one another in love' - we care deeply about each other and love informs all of our dealings. Part of the genius of Wesley was that he developed house groups to do that - our schools are places where the needs of anyone become the needs of everyone.
- \* Wesley was keen to say 'the world is my parish.' A key marker is that Methodists live on a large map with wide and large perspectives and an interest in the global issues.
- \* A religion that works. This is not just about formality - this is about finding a faith that works - a faith which can withstand questioning. A faith that engages with the issues of life in a deep and meaningful and life enhancing way.
- \* Methodism has always had a huge involvement in social holiness. Projects, pieces of work and campaigning that strive for justice and peace have always had a central role in all that the Methodist Church seeks to achieve.
- \* It is no accident that the current Methodist collection of hymns is called 'Singing the Faith' - proclaiming and understanding what we believe through heartfelt singing has been a marker of Methodists since the beginning. Early Methodists were taught their theology by the beautiful poetry in hymn writing of John's brother, Charles.
- \* Inclusivity - if God has made all and is in all then all are welcome and all are loved. We work hard to include everybody - because that is what God does. That also means that Methodists have always been at the forefront of ecumenical conversations because good relations with others of faith has always been of huge importance to us.
- \* Living with contradictory convictions - John Wesley once preached a sermon called the Catholic Spirit. The willingness to accept that other people hold different opinions from yours and not falling out over it (including views on religion) is crucial.
- \* Connexional - a very oddly spelled word that refers to the nationwide Methodist Church in the UK. Methodism is a national Church with a Conference that makes central decisions. There is a fundamental understanding in Methodism that we are joined up, responsible for, accountable to and supportive of each other as well as having to respond to our own contexts and needs.

Slide 12: To apply these markers to the way that our schools operate, act and think each and every day is the way we put our ethos into action. Our schools are places where we 'watch over one another in love', live on a large map and where inclusivity is something that we live out everyday in all the areas that we can. We do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can to all the people we can, as long as ever we can.' *Questions.*