

The Work of the Susanna Wesley Foundation

Appendix to the Southlands Methodist Trust's Report to the Strategy and Resources Committee of the Methodist Church - September 2015

The Susanna Wesley Foundation is establishing a community of scholarship, research and innovation at Southlands College informed by the needs of the Methodist Church and with the aim of producing outputs and outcomes which will be of benefit to the Church. The Foundation is identifying, supporting and promoting opportunities for research, enquiry and dialogue around issues of learning, diversity, change and transformation, leadership and organization in the context of Christian ministry and faith communities, particularly the Methodist Church.

The impetus for the establishment of the Susanna Wesley Foundation came from marrying the purposes of the Southlands Methodist Trust, as determined by Methodist Council, with various indicators about the needs of the Church in terms of scholarship, research and innovation (SRI). These needs were identified through a Connexion-wide consultation exercise conducted as part of the Fruitful Field process, input from those involved in research in the Connexional Team and information provided by former District Officers, as well as a knowledge of different local contexts. Positive responses from the senior leadership in the Connexional Team and from the wider Church, and endorsement by the Chair of the Network Committee, has led to confidence in progressing the work of the Foundation. This work has been well-received by ecumenical and academic partners, and welcomed by various constituencies in the Methodist Church, with invitations and commissions from local churches and communities as well as the leaders and officers of the DMLN.

The Foundation is drawing on expertise available via the University and, whilst it's primary connection is to Roehampton's Business School (since it is based in Southlands College and specializes in those academic areas identified as of relevance), it is forging relationships with other academic departments, notably theology and education, and with academics from other universities. It is also working with officers in the Methodist Church's Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network, with the London District, and with Methodist circuits and local communities.

There are various stands to the Foundation's work reflecting the combination of research, support for learning and innovation, and practical resources for churches and communities which are at the heart of its contribution. The following illustrates the range of activities in which it is involved.

- SWF is funding a number of doctoral students in their studies, and ensuring that their learning will be shared with the Methodist Church by linking them into the work of the Foundation. Developing

research topics, facilitating applications and forging links between theology and organizational studies has been fruitful leading to PhDs with co-supervisors from the different disciplines in areas which will bring learning of practical significance for the Church. *Theological understandings of gender, Strategy and theological reflection, The potential benefit to the Church of a discerning understanding and application of organizational and management theory* are among the topics being pursued.

- SWF has worked with the leadership team of a Methodist community project in Derbyshire and is hoping to sponsor its CEO through his doctoral studies. These will evaluate the factors critical to the project's success. The primary focus will be in theology but with the involvement also of a supervisor from the Business School. The learning from this research will have relevance to other community contexts - sharing such learning is part of the way the Foundation will make a difference.
- SWF has provided facilitation and support for an ecumenical endeavor within the London District and will be offering facilitation to a circuit leadership team. The Foundation will continue to be open to such requests for support in order to enable it to make a difference, to ensure that it is in touch with the local context and local churches, and to provide opportunities for it to apply the learning from its various projects and research activities.
- SWF and the Richmond & Hounslow circuit hope to embark on a joint programme in the 2015/16 connexional year. This will take the form of an action research project which, it is hoped, will impact on practice in local urban mission alongside the research.
- SWF is using action research in its work with a number of Regional Teams and with the specialisms in the Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network, leading to immediate benefits for the officers involved through the development of their practice in enabling learning in local contexts.
- SWF is exploring how it can contribute to some work around lay leadership and diversity which has been initiated by the London District and which aligns with some of the key research themes of the Foundation.
- SWF is carrying out a project on behalf of the Methodist Church gathering insights from experiences of practice based learning in the Churches and the professions. This will inform the development of the new circuit-based learning programme for initial ministerial training.

- SWF is in conversation about a potential commission by the DMLN to look at examples of good practice in local lay ministry in the Church of England to help to inform the development of the Methodist Church's Local Ministry Framework.
- SWF has commissioned research in connection with the experience and representation of women. One of these projects, looking at the experience of women in presbyteral ministry in the Methodist Church in Britain, is nearing completion. Another, focusing on women in leadership positions, compares the situation in the Education sector with that in the Churches and is moving into its second phase with some empirical research. It is drawing out lessons about those underlying events and mechanisms which impact on the representation and participation of women in leadership structures and its findings will lead to some recommendations.
- SWF continues its project exploring the importance and impact of demographic data monitoring activities amongst faith groups.
- SWF is embarking on research into cultural diversity and Methodist circuit ministry with a view to identifying the challenges and opportunities for the Church if it is to capitalise on the ministry of those from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- SWF is developing some research around well-being and ministry with a presbyter who has already carried out some work in this area.
- SWF is also looking at a potential research project considering the interface between chaplaincy and the ministry of the local church.
- SWF has, since its inception, organized two conferences at the University of Roehampton – 'Ministry & management: God & mammon?' (September 2014) and 'Gender Diversity Leadership' (June 2015) – both of which exposed some interesting and challenging issues and questions, encouraged ongoing dialogue and established new relationships and connections. The recorded feedback suggested that both had been useful and enjoyable. Conferences will continue to be a feature of the Foundation's provision, as will seminars and workshops.
- SWF has contributed to seminars at the University of Roehampton, those run by the theology department and by the business school.
- SWF has successfully applied for two academics from other universities who have publication records in the Foundation's identified research areas to receive Honorary Fellowships from the University of Roehampton. This will provide further possibilities for

expanding research activity and sharing learning, particularly for the Church. In the future the Foundation will offer fellowships to a number of Methodist ministers who are research active but who have no formal links with a specific higher education institution. These ministers will benefit from the support and resources which will be available to them via the University, and will be a valuable part of the community of scholarship which the Foundation is seeking to establish.

- SWF is partnering with a London circuit to share the stationing of a minister who will be involved in research alongside his circuit ministry.
- SWF has secured the time of one of the academics in Roehampton Business School to partner with the Foundation in research activities in his areas of expertise.
- SWF is at the point of recruiting a core staff team, having, until now, relied largely on commissioned projects, research fellowships and some limited input from academic staff who are employed by the University. It is also exploring the possibility of Junior Fellowships, specifically to encourage young postdoctoral scholars from within Methodism to develop as academic leaders.

This gives a flavour of the Foundation's activities. As will be gathered from the above, SWF actively seeks involvement from different constituencies within the Methodist Church and is open to approaches from the DMLN, from districts, and from circuits and churches who want to be involved in the Foundation's work and learn with and from it. The building-blocks are in place to enable the Foundation to take advantage of the resources available to it through the University, to involve academics and practitioners, and to engage the Church in understanding and developing its practice.