

# AINSDALE METHODIST CHURCH REVIEW 2021

## Our Mission Statement:

To Share Locally and Globally in the Whole Church's Purpose of the Worship of God and the Care of People.

## Introduction

Earlier this year, like all churches in the Circuit, we were asked to undertake a "Church Review" – looking back and forward in order to see more clearly where we are at present. This process enables us to discover our Strengths and Weaknesses; envision our Opportunities moving forwards and identify any Threats for which we may need help and support to exercise our ministry.

The review looked at the following:

- The History of the Church – where had we come from, what had made us who we are.
- The Community in which we are set, including other churches, schools and community groups.
- The Worship life of the church, the heartbeat of every church family.
- The Mission of the church.

This has been a complex and time-consuming project, taking place during and after the Covid-19 lockdown in 2021, and we would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all who helped in any way.

From the information collated and presented within this report we have an opportunity to discern where God is leading us and how we can be enabled and equipped to serve him within the Southport Circuit and as the people called Methodist here in Ainsdale.

## Past History of Ainsdale Methodist Church.

Throughout its history the church has been an integral part of the local area. The church buildings and members of the congregation have played active and important roles in the life of the community, supporting the spiritual and social needs.

Before the building of the church, Ainsdale had no place of worship or school. However, the success of Sunday services and a Sunday school in rooms at White Otter farm proved there was a need for a church. After overcoming some opposition from the Weld Blundell family, a site was found and the church was built in 1866.

The church became a firmly established part of the community and to meet the need for a local school in 1890 a schoolroom was added and a free school established which was attended by children of all denominations.

Due to continued growth, additional space was required. In 1920 the Memorial Hall was built in memory of Robert Simpson who died in India whilst on missionary service. The construction of the hall provided additional schoolrooms, vestries and a kitchen.

In 1934 further schoolrooms were added as the school became fully graded and was taken over by Lancashire Education Committee.

Even during the blitz of World War 2 the church was helping the community providing a place for members of the Fire Service to rest.

It was during the war that the congregation demonstrated their Christian living by inviting German prisoners of war to join several services.

There have always been a number of active groups and activities in the life of the church and for many years there was a choir to lead singing during services. Social groups have included a Drama group, Badminton club, a men's supper club, Methodist Guild, and toddlers' group. In addition, there have been strong youth organisations, Boys Brigade, Girl Guides and Brownies. The church also held a summer garden party during which the Rose Queen was selected.

The commitment to youth was shown in 1986 with the establishment of a youth council, consisting of leaders of The Sunday school and the Youth organisations.

Possible merging of local churches has from time to time been discussed. It was in 1971, when the URC church was exploring building a new church and social centre, that it sounded out other local churches about possible mergers. Again in 1995, when Ainsdale was redeveloping its buildings an approach was made to the URC church about a possible merger, however the URC decided they did not wish to pursue this further.

Co-operation between the Ainsdale churches has developed with the signing of the CTiA covenant which was first signed in 1994. Prior to this there had been pulpit exchanges between the different churches.

The 1960's and 70's saw a growth in Ainsdale, with the developments of new housing estates, schools and even a holiday camp.

As the population of the village grew so did the congregation and there was increased activity within the life of the church. In 1981, there was a large Sunday school with an attendance of 94 children. A 9 am service was started as there was not sufficient capacity in a single service for everyone who wished to attend. Unfortunately, by 1985 the 9 am service was reduced to just once per month and there was concern about the dwindling numbers at the evening service.

The church activity was not just growing on Sunday. To meet the needs of the elderly members of the community, in 1982 a Senior Citizens club, 'Pop in Centre', a Lunch and social afternoon all began. These clubs developed into the Neighbourhood Care Scheme, in 1983, to help relieve loneliness within the community.

Continuing the commitment to the local community, in 1991, the church was an active supporter of the Woodvale Community Centre.

The growing involvement in the community required a larger pool of volunteers to support the delivery of the different activities. In 1984, following an idea from a Church Stewardship initiative in 1966, another Church Stewardship campaign was undertaken with a "Time and Talents" questionnaire to recruit volunteers, which was successful. Further Church Stewardship campaigns were held at regular intervals over the period 1987 – 98.

Since 1995, there has been a decline in the membership, which has seen some of the church activities no longer taking place. However, the Neighbourhood care scheme has continued to grow and develop and many of the activities do still continue alongside some new ones.

The maintenance of the Church and buildings remains an ongoing issue as it was 50 years ago and will continue into the future for the generations to come.

## **Millennium Onwards**

The years since 2000 have seen a slow and steady decline in the membership of the church. This has been most notable in the youth and children's elements. A report by the Christian Research Organisation showed a significant decline in church attendance and changing life patterns.

For the millennium it was decided to hold a service that included the dedication of new stained glass windows, which were designed by a member of the congregation and it was a real enhancement to the church.

The following years were concerned with the decreasing numbers of clergy as well as financial concerns both at local and district level. The number of ministers in the district have halved resulting in ministers being responsible for more than one church.

At Ainsdale, the church has seen the departure of Rev. Martin Abrams, Rev. Jan Fraser and welcomed Rev. Patrick Evans as church minister. Whilst the number of ministers have reduced, at AMC we have been fortunate in having had a good pool of Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders to lead worship over this time.

Throughout the period there was consideration regarding the falling attendances at the Sunday evening service. Services continued once a month until early 2020 but following the Coronavirus pandemic have been replaced by monthly Circuit Services.

The church has seen the creation of a new Wednesday morning service with a regular group from the church meeting each week. There is also an enthusiastic Bible study group that meets on a fortnightly basis. A new choir has been established from the congregation and had led the singing in some services before the current restrictions

Along with the decline in church membership, we have also seen the loss of the Sunday School and JMA group, although the Boys Brigade still meet at the church. However, on a more positive note, Sticky church was established in 2011, later changing its name to Messy church, although at present it is compromised due to a lack of both volunteers and participants.

Ainsdale Community Care (ACC) has been part of the church since 1982 and has relied on the church support and buildings. In 2009 it became an independent charity and is no longer under the control of the Church Council, having its own board of trustees. The charity changed its name to Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure (ALL) to better reflect its activities. It remains a thriving and integral part of the church's mission and both the church and charity have a co-dependency.

In 2016 the church celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and together with ALL raised the funds to create The Anniversary garden at the rear of the church. Through the planning and hard work of a group of dedicated volunteers a garden took shape that now provides a peaceful place to sit, reflect and remember loved ones, as well as encouraging people to come and use the garden to plant and play in God's creation.

In keeping with its commitment and support of the local community, in 2014, a branch of the Trussell Trust Southport Foodbank was opened in the church hall. It is supported by volunteers from all the churches in Ainsdale. The Foodbank supports individuals and families in need in the local community. In 2016, 386 residents accessed the Foodbank.

During the pandemic, over the last year, the Foodbank opened twice per week becoming a hub for local community businesses to make donations to support the Foodbank operation of providing much needed help for those affected by the pandemic.

Over the last twenty years the church buildings have been maintained by a small dedicated group who have been able to carry out the essential work to keep the church in good order. The church and minister's vestry have been redecorated, the memorial hall renovated and most recently the choir vestry has had replacement windows fitted and been decorated.

Frequently at AGM's the property stewards have highlighted a long list of items requiring attention as well as long term plans for work and maintenance of the church. However, it has become evident during the last 20 years that the slow and steady decline in church numbers and an ageing membership, means fewer people are available to commit to the stewardship of the church.

## Ainsdale Demographics & Statistics

**2011 Census: Population 12,100**

Ethnicity: 96% born in UK 2% mixed heritage, BAME

29% homes occupied by 1 person

19% homes occupied by someone 65+

10% lone parent

79.3% identified as Christian

19.4% identified as No Religion

**2015: Population 12,600** 2% increase over decade.

31% - 65+ 4% - 85+ 55% working age (16 - 65)

**2019: Population 12,811**

(0 -17) 2225 - 17.4% (18 – 64) 6574 – 51.3%

(65+) 4012 – 31.3%

## Finance, Membership & Attendance

| AMC Finance & Membership 2014 to 2021 |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Year Ending 31st Aug                  | 2014    | 2015    | 2016    | 2017    | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    |
| Offerings                             | £26,096 | £28,504 | £25,707 | £30,481 | £29,020 | £27,137 | £21,755 | £30,923 |
| Total Income                          |         |         |         |         |         | £67,853 | £44,897 | £71,395 |
| Circuit Assessment                    | £34,078 | £37,753 | £34,540 | £33,943 | £34,027 | £32,652 | £29,168 | £32,256 |
| Total Expenditure                     |         |         |         |         |         | £68,353 | £77,431 | £64,536 |
| Total Funds at year end               | £61,889 | £69,176 | £78,588 | £74,156 | £69,229 | £68,729 | £36,195 | £43,054 |
| Membership                            | 106     | 87      | 80      | 80      | 80      | 76      | 73      | 68      |
| Ave Weekly Attendance                 | 53      | 61      | 46      | 38      | 41      | 42      | 25      | 32      |

Notes:

Finance figures for 2020 and 2021 are unaudited.

Ave Weekly Attendance will include both members and non-members

## AN OVERVIEW OF OUR COMMUNITY

Ainsdale/Woodvale is situated in the south end of Southport and has a population of around 12,000 being mostly residential.

The area has numerous churches as well as ours: Two Catholic Churches, St Johns C of E, The Village Church and Woodvale Chapel. The churches come together as a fellowship through Churches Together in Ainsdale (CtiA). We have three Infant/Junior Schools two of which have nurseries. There are also two private nurseries and a school for children with special needs. We no longer have a secondary school and the children travel to Formby or other schools in Southport.

Recreational areas include the Village Park on Liverpool Road, Sandbrook Park off Orchard Lane, a Playground on Gleneagles Drive, Ainsdale Sports Club, Bowling Greens, Tennis Club. We have a beach, sand dunes and pinewoods with public access.

Social life for older people includes Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure (ALL), a charity which uses our premises to deliver activities and lunches which can be delivered if needed. This charity helps to reduce social isolation in the community and promotes Health and Wellbeing. Many people retire here and we have a significant number of older people living alone.

EDDA is another charity which uses the old library building in the village. It works with Bridge Inn Farm to provide services and activities for adults with disabilities. They run a small library and have a small stage for drama and have also helped with ALL in the gardens at church.

Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association (WACA) is situated on Meadow Lane. They are involved in running activities for both young and old. They have kept in touch with those who use their services during the lockdown. They also have a minibus for trips out.

The Churches collectively provide: Worship on Sundays at various times, Bible Study, Midweek Prayers, Bereavement Courses, Job Club, Holiday Club, Messy Church, Foodbank (Through Compassion Acts) at Ainsdale Methodist with volunteers from across CTiA, The Place 2 Be at St John Stones, Impact for young people moving from Primary to Secondary education run by the Southport and Area Schools Worker Trust, Boys Brigade and Duke of Edinburgh Award, Term time Toddler Group, Guides, Rainbows and Brownies, Youth Group on Friday evenings and Monday evenings.

The Churches get involved with community services on the Village Green on Remembrance Sunday and after the Ainsdale Show using a large tent for Joint Worship.

There are plans in progress to build next to Sandbrook Park – 40 Family Houses for joint ownership and rental and 90 flats for those requiring extra support. This is planned by Riverside Housing. Sandway are also building new family homes on Meadow Lane which hopefully will be completed in the near future. We hope to be able to put together Welcome Packs for our new residents.

We continue to work very closely with Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure. Many of our congregation volunteer – working in the charity shop, helping with activities, delivery of lunches and as Trustees.

## What does the future hold? What will the new normal be?

Hopefully as Christians we will continue to find ways to work in the community, to engage in community projects, to continue using our buildings to improve lives and bring more disciples to know Jesus. Continue to support activities for young and old alike and work with Churches Together in Ainsdale.

This year we have supported a new venture called Make Lunch with TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) a Christian organisation which trains and supports volunteers in schools giving one-to-one support and providing lunches for disadvantaged children along with activities during school holidays.

We are also involved in a new group called WAVE (Woodvale and Ainsdale Volunteering Enterprise). The group are hoping to encourage community engagement with volunteers to improve the local environment, opening a church garden for the community at St John Stones and hopefully much more. This group includes clergy, residents, local politicians, Social Prescribers and Sefton CVS.

## Survey

As part of our consultations we asked the church membership and close adherents to complete a questionnaire covering the following areas:

- The impact of Covid-19 on church life
- Worship & Fellowship
- The church's place in the local community

70 questionnaires were sent out and 39 responses were received although not everybody answered every question. A summary of the results can be found on our website ([www.ainsdalemethodistchurch.org.uk](http://www.ainsdalemethodistchurch.org.uk)) or alternatively a printed copy can be requested from any of the stewards.

After analysing the responses a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was completed covering Worship & Fellowship and Mission:

# WORSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

## STRENGTHS

Standard of Presbyters, Local Preachers, Worship Leaders

Music – organists, singers, other instrumentalists

Location & accessibility of building

Pastoral Care system

Wednesday Prayers

Bible Study

Friendly & Welcoming

Fellowship

## WEAKNESSES

Shared Presbyter (leads to lack of continuity)

Limited number of people available to lead worship

Communication – internal & external

Limited use of local & social media

Declining attendance

Inflexibility of worship space

Lack of volunteers for jobs

Current worship does not appeal to the younger age group

## OPPORTUNITIES

Talks with The Village Church

Increased use of Garden space

Themed preaching

Different styles of worship – maybe on different days/times

Worship/activities shared with Circuit/CTiA to spread the workload

Grants available for refurbishment/projects

## THREATS

COVID

Declining Membership

Age profile of Membership

Decreasing Finance

Cost of upkeep of building

Lack of people for key jobs

Social pressures from modern society

# MISSION

## STRENGTHS

Work with Ainsdale Lunch & Leisure  
Location, size & accessibility of Building  
Fellowship within the church  
OCTAVE  
Variety of work & life skills in congregation  
Work with CTiA

## WEAKNESSES

Knowledge of how to engage with younger generation  
Communication – internal & external  
Limited use of local & social media  
Some gaps in skills amongst congregation e.g. seeking grants  
Lack of volunteers  
Age profile of congregation

## OPPORTUNITIES

Further partnership working with Ainsdale Lunch & Leisure  
Ecumenical Partnership with CTiA (e.g. Impact, Foodbank, Remembrance Service, Ainsdale Show, Eco Church)  
Use of building/garden for Community Events (e.g. Flu Clinics)  
New Local Initiatives e.g. Make Lunch, WAVE (Woodvale & Ainsdale Volunteering Enterprise)  
Bereavement Course  
Re-opening of Toddler Group  
Potential from proposed new housing off Sandbrook Road  
Opening the church during the week (themed displays during the year)  
Grants available to enable mission

## THREATS

COVID  
Cost of upkeep of the building  
Decreasing Finance  
Lack of volunteers  
Complexity of administration needed to manage activities (i.e. Risk assessments, Safeguarding, DBS checks etc.)  
Pressure on Presbyters – needs to be reduced to enable them to lead on mission  
Social pressures from modern society

## Our Opportunities

- **Styles of worship** - the Survey highlighted that the majority of people (65%) like variety in their worship although the Traditional format was still the most favoured. With the resources we currently have we are supporting worship on a Sunday morning and Wednesday prayers. Suggestions for the Worship Group to consider bearing in mind the resources available include additional worship on a different day through perhaps a Regular Coffee Morning with Café Style worship or a Thought for the Day, continuing to have occasional services in either the Lounge or Garden, use of Iona/Taize liturgies.
- **Worship/Activities shared with Circuit/CTiA to spread the workload** – this is already happening with the 9am and 6.30pm services being offered as Circuit Services. Also, as above, we are planning joint worship with The Village Church. We can also be a venue for shared activities as we have excellent facilities e.g. for the Bereavement Course.
- **Talks with The Village Church** – these are on-going but we now need to move forward. We suggest regular services alternating between the two churches. Midweek activities could also be shared e.g. Bible Study, Prayers, Youth Work. We need to explore together what a future formal relationship could look like.
- **Bible Study** – this has been on-going through the pandemic but some were unable to engage with this. A review of day/time/content is under way for resuming this at Ainsdale.
- **Godly Play** – We have Godly Play material but currently no one trained to deliver it. 4 people expressed interest in helping with Godly Play in the Survey and this should be followed up.
- **Themed Preaching** – this was mentioned in the Survey & would aid continuity and allow an in depth look at particular parts of the Bible or certain key characters or time period.
- **The Garden** – the rear garden was well used during the summer for Wednesday Prayers. It could be opened up to the community during the week (wheelchair/pushchair access by the side of the church has been improved). Both front & rear gardens could also host church and community events. One suggestion is to raise our profile in the village by adding lighting to the trees at the front.
- **Youth Work** – We do not feel that we have the resources at present to do Youth Work ourselves, apart from perhaps the Toddler Group – restarting this yet to be explored, although there are other places within Ainsdale or the Circuit where we can offer help in this area as we are able. Our BB Company continue to meet on a Monday & Thursday.

- **Link with Ainsdale Lunch & Leisure (ALL)** – 94.1% of respondents to the Survey felt that ALL was part of the church's mission. We need to continue engaging with ALL, perhaps run some joint activities. Ideas put forward so far include a Remembrance Day Service & Display, asking Rebecca (ALL's Manager) to speak to the congregation to raise ALL's profile, a Christmas event of carols/readings, informing people across the Circuit of ALL's services/activities to encourage both members, volunteers and trustees.
- **Churches Together in Ainsdale** – a good ecumenical partnership. They are planning to focus on ECO Church with all churches pooling ideas & resources.
- **Opening the Church During the Week** – it would be good to have the church open for private reflection/prayer during the week even if only for 1 or 2 days to start with. Small themed displays could be provided in either the transept or porch during the year to provide a focus e.g Lent, Harvest, Remembrance. These could range from a single prayer card to something more elaborate.
- **New Residents** – we should explore putting together a welcome pack that could be delivered to any new housing in the area and also given to new members of the congregation.
- **WAVE (Woodvale & Ainsdale Volunteering Enterprise)** – this is a new local initiative, started a few months ago, to encourage anyone from the local area to volunteer time to the community. Regular meetings are being held and we are already represented at these.
- **Use of Building/Garden for Community Events** – this gives us potential opportunities for interacting with a wide variety of local individuals and groups.
- **Administration** – we thank everyone who contributes now or has contributed in the past to the life of our church. Administration has become increasingly burdensome – Policies to put in place, Safeguarding checks, Covid protocols and risk assessments etc. It is becoming increasingly difficult to fill roles within the church and so we suggest that, where we can, some roles may be rationalised/shared. This could be just within the church or might involve working with others across the circuit. To this end we propose setting up a Leadership Team here at Ainsdale comprised of Stewards, Property Stewards & Treasurer which will rationalise the number of meetings needed and hopefully lead to smoother running of the church. It will also hopefully free up time for us to concentrate on our mission in Ainsdale.
- **Communication** – we need to ensure that our services/events are marketed across both the village and circuit, embracing social media, updating our website etc.
- **Grants** – Grants are available for both mission and capital works. No-one, in the Survey, showed interest in this area.

## Conclusion

The following are quotes from the Survey and sum up well the position we find ourselves in as a result of COVID-19:

‘As we have been through a time like no other we must allow ourselves the space and opportunities to regroup, heal and be restored. Must be aware that others may need to journey at a different pace and everyone should be able to be honest about their experiences and where they are now. This is a great opportunity to do church differently so we mustn't lose that. People offer what they can (not what they think they should) and we cut our cloth accordingly. Don't try and do everything but do what we do well. Our priorities should be the worship of God, nurture and care of one another and service of our neighbours local and global.’

‘We, along with all churches are at a crossroads. Do we need to honestly face what we have learned through the experiences of the last year and to ask how we can best act on what we have learned? If we are to remain open as a building, do we, for instance, need to enable the sanctuary to be more open as a place of private reflexion and prayer? There is a lot more discussion and engagement to be done.’

We are gradually resuming many aspects of church and pray that we will not be required to lockdown again.

We have a good worshipping and caring community here at Ainsdale Methodist Church. The opportunities we have highlighted are positive but cannot be achieved without both congregation and circuit support.

From the circuit we need support mainly in two areas:

- Safeguarding – After many years Doreen Goulding is standing down as our Safeguarding Officer at the end of the year. This is a difficult job as the legislation is complex and carries with it huge responsibilities. We feel it would be better if this role was provided by the circuit.
- Oversight and Maintenance of Property – Maintenance of a building such as ours, which is heavily used, is constant and the volume of work has become beyond the means of volunteers and our part time Caretaker. There is also increasing administration around the quinquennial inspections and current health and safety legislation. We would like administrative support from the circuit in this area.

Within our church there are key roles where help is needed: Safeguarding Officer (see above), Stewards, Property Stewards, Porch Stewards, Refreshments. To ease administration generally the Stewards are recommending that we have a Leadership Team of Stewards, Property Stewards and Treasurer who will meet together regularly. This will reduce the number of meetings and ensure better communication.

Whilst we look forward to playing our part in Circuit life where we can and rely on their support and encouragement we are keen to foster our own role within our local community. Our links with Churches Together in Ainsdale and Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure are strong and we would want to maintain these.

We recommend that Church Council takes time to consider the Opportunities we have highlighted. This review hopefully will enable us to plan for the future both in the next few months, as we recover from the effects of the Pandemic, and in the years ahead.