

# Introducing the Independent Methodists



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Independent Methodist Churches

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Lamberhead Green, Loch Street  
Leigh, Kirkhall Lane  
Leigh, Mill Lane  
Lowton, Newton Road  
Newtown, Victoria Street  
Pemberton, Ormskirk Road  
Tyldesley, Primrose Street North

## ISLE OF MAN

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## MERSEYSIDE

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St. Helens Haydock, West End Road  
Sutton Village, Herbert Street, Sutton  
Thatto Heath, West Street, Toll Bar  
Sefton Crosby, Seafeld Avenue

## TYNE & WEAR

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Hebburn, Victoria Road West  
Sunderland Bank Head, Fence Houses  
Easington Lane, Brickgarth  
Grindon, Bethany Memorial, Gleneagles Road  
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Ryhope, Cliffe Road  
South Hylton, Railway Terrace  
Thorney Close, Bethel

## WEST YORKSHIRE

Kirklees Dewsbury, Thornton Street, Boothroyd Lane

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Resource Centre, Fleet Street, Pemberton, WIGAN WN5 0DS

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## LOCATIONS OF CHURCHES

BRISTOL                      Staple Hill, Soundwell Road  
   Warmley, Mill Lane

### CHESHIRE

Warrington                      Appleton, Parish Hall, Dudlow Green Road  
   Croft, The Olive Branch  
   Culcheth, Hob Hey Lane  
   Grappenhall, Knutsford Road  
   Lymm, Cherry Lane  
   Risley, Fearnhead Lane, Fearnhead  
   Stockton Heath, Walton Road  
   Warrington, Friars Green, Cairo Street  
   Warrington, Kent Street, Latchford

### DURHAM

Durham                              Brandon, Murray, Sawmills Estate  
   South Hetton, Front Street  
Easington                              Murton, Woods Terrace  
   Seaham, Enfield Road  
   Seaham, Stanley Street  
Sedgefield                              Spennymoor, Mount Pleasant, Half Moon Lane  
   Spennymoor, Jubilee, Clarence Street

### GREATER MANCHESTER

Bolton                              Bolton, Noble Street  
Bury                                      Radcliffe, Bridgefield Street  
Oldham                                Failsworth, Roman Road  
Salford                                Moorside, Hazelhurst Road, Swinton  
   Roe Green, Greenleach Lane, Worsley  
Trafford                                Trafford Christian Life Centre, Barton Road                      Stretford

Wigan                                Ashton-in-Makerfield, Bryn, Downall Green Road  
   Ashton-in-Makerfield, Downall Green, Victoria Road  
   Ashton-in-Makerfield, Stubshaw Cross, Bolton Road  
   Astley, Manchester Road  
   Atherton, Mealhouse Lane  
   Hindley, Argyle Street  
   Ince-in-Makerfield, Keble Street  
   Ince-in-Makerfield, Hope Street, Spring View

## STATEMENT OF PRACTICE

### CHURCHES

Each Church is self-governing. Subject to the Church's trust deed, the members meeting is the final authority in all matters affecting the Church.

### CIRCUITS

Groups of Churches are associated in Circuits for mutual benefit. The meetings of the Circuits are deliberative in character and recommendations can only be effective by the co-operation of each Church. The organisation of each Circuit is outlined in its rules.

### CONNEXION

All member Churches constitute the Connexion of Independent Methodist Churches. The organisation of the Connexion is outlined in its constitution.

[a] Every believer is called to service in the Kingdom of God, there being no distinction between one believer and another beyond that of function. It is recognised that differing talents, spiritual gifts and ministries are bestowed on believers for the benefit of the church as a whole. Each church should, therefore, recognise and cultivate the talents, gifts and ministries of its members so that it may function as a ministering fellowship.

[b] To assist in church leadership, pastoral responsibility and the ministry of the Word and sacraments, the Connexion commissions to its ministry those who have been called to ministerial appointment in one or more of the Connexion's churches and who have met the qualifications laid down in the current statement on Ministry.

[c] To assist in the wider ministry of the Word, the Connexion commissions and accredits preachers who have been nominated by their church and Circuit and who have met the appropriate qualifications laid down in the current Statement on Ministry.

[d] The Connexion may, from time to time, provide training and accredit people to other specified ministries in the Connexion, such as Bible teachers, evangelists, missionaries, missionaries and youth workers.

The Connexion makes no provision for the financial support of any personnel other than its central staff, evangelists and overseas missionaries.

### MISSION

The Connexion is concerned with the spread of the Gospel at home and overseas. Where required, Churches and Missions are assisted and new Churches or Missions may be formed, using Connexional resources of finance and personnel.

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## WHO ARE THE INDEPENDENT METHODISTS?

The Independent Methodist Connexion is a group of churches which are situated mainly in the North of England. Most of them bear the name 'Independent Methodist', but a few others have local names, often related to their origins. Each church is self-governing, but the Connexion acts as a spiritual and collective focal point. The fact that the denomination is a small one gives it a character quite different from much larger church bodies. This has the advantage of simplified administration, but the drawback of a limited national profile.

As you read through the following pages, you will find a description of the Connexion and its activities.

## HOW DID THEY BEGIN?

The Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches was not started by one individual on a specific occasion. A number of churches began in separate places, quite spontaneously, but with similar characteristics. Of these, the first was in Warrington, beginning in 1796. This church, along with others at Manchester, Stockport, Macclesfield, and Oldham, had their first known gathering together in 1806 at Manchester. Annual Meetings and exchange of preachers were the only tangible links between the churches for many years. Of the leading figures in the early years, the most prominent was Peter Phillips of Warrington; he is generally regarded as the denomination's founding father. By trade he was a chair maker, but as an unpaid minister and preacher he travelled a wide area of the country and drew many churches into the Connexion during the first half of the nineteenth century.



Peter Phillips

Though some of the early churches used the title Independent Methodist, there were many other names: for example, Free Gospel Church, Christian Lay Church and Quaker Methodist. It was not until 1898 that the Annual Meeting finally chose the name Independent Methodist Connexion.

As the name suggests, the Independent Methodists owe much to the traditions of Wesleyan Methodism, from which many of the earliest churches broke away. In early days, there were strong links with the Primitive Methodists. Peter Phillips and Hugh Bourne, the founder of Primitive Methodism, were close associates and, at one time, it seemed possible that the two movements would develop into one. Many of the Independent Methodist Churches which were formed in the latter half of the nineteenth century came from Primitive Methodist roots. This is particularly so in the churches of County Durham and Bristol.

Quaker influence was also prevalent among some early Independent Methodists, notably in the Warrington area, with many adopting the Quaker plainness of speech and dress. Like

of God and are the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

## THE CHURCH

We believe that the Church is the whole company of the redeemed in heaven and on earth and consists of all who are united to God through faith in Christ.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which is His body. The purpose of the Church is to worship God, to promote the fellowship of his people, to preach the Gospel and to make disciples of all nations.

## THE SACRAMENTS

We believe that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are to be practised in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that in the observance of the Lord's Supper, Christ is certainly and really present, though not bodily in the elements.

When used by believers with faith and prayer, the sacraments are, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

We believe in the priesthood of all believers, affirming that each believer has direct access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The individual believer is required to render obedience to Christ in every area of life, seeking always, under His direction, the advancement of His Kingdom.

## **STATEMENT OF FAITH**

### **THE TRINITY**

We believe in One Living and True God, Creator of all, eternal in three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Him alone we worship and adore.

### **GOD THE FATHER**

We believe that God the Father Almighty, in holy love, gave His Son for the salvation of mankind.

### **GOD THE SON**

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son. For our sake He became man, was truly human and truly divine, and lived a sinless human life.

We believe that He reveals the Father, that He died to atone for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and was exalted. He is our Advocate, Mediator and Lord.

We believe that he will return personally in power and glory.

### **GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We believe that God the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement. He causes those who repent to be born anew and dwells within them, witnessing to their salvation and developing the fruit of a Godly life. He endows believers with gifts for the up building of the Church. He glorifies Jesus.

### **MANKIND**

We believe that all people are sinful and are unable to deliver themselves from the guilt, penalty and power of their sin.

### **SALVATION**

We believe that salvation from the guilt, penalty and power of sin to eternal life is a free gift of God.

Salvation is His purpose for all mankind and is only possible through personal faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that all must stand before the final judgement of Christ and that those who have refused His salvation will be separated eternally from God.

### **THE BIBLE**

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word

the Quakers, Independent Methodists draw no distinction between clergy and laity, though they have designated ministers. (see 'Ministry')

## **WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?**

The Independent Methodist Churches are Trinitarian, believing that God the Father is revealed through Jesus Christ His Son, who alone is Saviour of the World. The Holy Spirit makes God's saving work real in the lives of His people. On acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, a person is born again and becomes a child of God by adoption.

To read the doctrines of the denomination in full, see the Connexion's 'Statement of Faith,' which is given as an Appendix at the back of this booklet.

## **MINISTRY**

There is no function in the life of the church which is restricted to a distinctive clerical order or which is exclusively male. In fact, there is no centrally organised, stipendiary ministry, though individual churches are free to employ personnel if they choose to do so. Ministers (usually unpaid) are nominated by churches from amongst their membership and undertake a period of part time study prior to their recognition as ministers by the Connexion.

While they have no exclusive functions in their churches, they undertake responsibility for preaching and pastoral work. Most ministers take preaching appointments in churches of their local circuits and sometimes further afield.

## **WORSHIP**

Patterns of worship vary widely among the churches. Some have a very traditional type of free church service, while others practise the style of open worship associated with the charismatic movement - and there are all shades between!

## **SACRAMENTS**

Independent Methodists practise the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in common with protestant denominations generally. In the case of baptism, some churches practise baptism of infants, while others choose to baptise believers only. The local church, subject to its trust deeds, makes its own decision on this matter.

The Lord's Supper is practised with varying frequencies among the churches. Attendance is generally based on personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and there are no barriers to people from other denominations participating, if they share the same faith.

## HOW DO I JOIN?

Members are received into the fellowship of a local church on the basis of personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and regular church attendance. Members are expected to uphold the church's doctrines and to seek to live a Christian life daily.

Though the Independent Methodists have no formal arrangement for transfer of members to and from other denominations, this is arranged amicably in most cases.

For the guidance of churches, the Connexion publishes '*Model Church Rules*' and '*Christian Foundations*,' though the use of these documents is entirely optional.

## THE LOCAL CHURCH

Each local church is a gathered body of believing Christians who meet together for worship and who apply their faith as they work to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to their local communities. The churches are entirely autonomous and are responsible for their own government, finance and property. They operate their own systems of membership and form their own rules.

## CHURCHES IN ONE AREA

Where there are several churches in fairly close proximity they form themselves voluntarily into circuits. Within the circuit structure, the churches work together on projects of mutual concern and give support to each other.

## ALL THE CHURCHES TOGETHER

All the churches of the denomination form the Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches. Its organisation is defined fully in its Constitution. Between Annual Meetings, the functions of the Connexion are maintained by the Connexional Committee. This consists of officers elected at the Annual Meeting and members nominated by the circuits. Several working groups are formed to undertake responsibility for particular areas of work.

Meetings of the Connexional Committee are held during the year to organise activities and to deal with matters relating to funds, property and reports from external bodies. Departmental Committees have further meetings as occasion requires.

## INDEPENDENT METHODIST ASSOCIATION INC.

For legal purposes, the ownership of all Connexionally held assets is vested in the Inde-

## FINANCE

The Finance Committee is responsible for the general oversight of Connexional funds and provides guidance as to their best use. It will give advice, on request, to churches on all general financial matters, including investment schemes and the reclamation of Income Tax through covenanted giving.

Grants or loans may be available to churches for work carried out on the extension of property, the expansion of facilities or repairs to existing buildings.

The General Fund exists to maintain the work of the Connexion and its departments. Other funds, some of which result from legacies, provide grants for specific areas of work.

## SAFEGUARDING / CHILD PROTECTION

The Connexion has a child protection policy and has a Child Protection Liaison Officer who:

- Promotes this issue among the churches by advising them of good practice.
- Organises child protection courses.
- Arranges DBS checks for Connexional ministers.

## THE NORTHWOOD CHRISTIAN CENTRE at High Legh

The closure in 1996 of one of the Connexion's churches provided a golden opportunity to turn the premises into a small conference and retreat centre. The Northwood Christian Centre at High Legh is located in the Cheshire countryside, near Knutsford.

Its accommodation comprises a beautifully appointed cottage which can be used for holidays / mid-week breaks and by individuals and small groups on retreat; a hall which can seat 50 people, with linked kitchen facilities; and half an acre of lawns which can be used for outdoor activities including barbeques, fun days, camping. The hall was extended in 2006 by the addition of more meeting space, a disabled toilet and shower facilities.

It is used by the churches of the Connexion and also by others outside the denomination.





## MINISTRY

This department arranges the education, training and support of Connexional ministers. However, taking ministry in its wider sense, it aims to support Christian service in as wide a context as possible. It offers the following services:

### (a) Ministry Training and Accreditation

The training and education of candidates for the ministry is currently under review and is expected to be outsourced in the future. Where appropriate qualifications have been achieved, the Ministry department oversees the recognition as Connexional ministers of those successful candidates whose call to the ministry of preaching, sacraments and pastoral care is validated by their local churches, circuits and the Connexion. This includes the provision and issue of certificates. It also offers guidance to churches on the acceptance of ministers and will participate in Commissioning Services where requested.

### (b) Education Scheme

This does not serve as a training course for the denominational ministry but caters for those seeking education in biblical and theological subjects who may be looking to equip themselves for specific areas of service. It provides:

- Studies in the Bible, Christian theology and other subjects relevant to Christian service.
- Tutorial support. Reference books, teaching notes and aids to study are supplied for enrolled students and their tutors.
- Regular assessment of students' course work and annual report on progress.
- Two study weekends each year.

### (c) Ministry

- An annual conference which is aimed at Ministers and Students but open to others.
- Supply of Christian books to Connexional ministers at half price.
- Financial and other assistance to ministers 'in necessitous circumstances' where approved by the relevant officers.
- Advice and financial assistance for those wishing to attend or undertake an approved course of study.
- Occasional publications on subjects relevant to ministry.
- Development of relevant study guides for group use.
- Provision of the Services' Handbook which contains suggested forms for special services.
- Advice by telephone, letter or visit on an individual basis.
- Promoting theological reflection on matters concerning our relationships with other denominations.
- Keeping a watching brief on current issues of a moral or ethical nature.

pendent Methodist Association Incorporated, which was instituted in 1907 under the Companies Acts 1862 to 1900. The Articles of Association define the scope of the denomination's activities. Members of the current Connexional Committee serve as directors of the Association.

## ANNUAL MEETING

Once a year the churches come together for an Annual Meeting. This is usually a time of great inspiration and encouragement, which attracts many people year after year. Part of the time is spent on the business of the Connexion, when church delegates make decisions for the coming year, but the Annual Meeting is increasingly used as a gathering for fellowship, teaching and celebration. Sometimes it is held residentially at a conference centre; on other occasions it is hosted by a local church or circuit which provides hospitality for delegates in members' homes.

In addition to church delegates, individuals can book as visitors for the weekend. There are usually public meetings which anyone can attend on a daily basis.

## OFFICIALS

Part of the business of the Annual Meeting is to appoint the officers of the Connexion. Any member of an Independent Methodist Church is eligible for office.

## WHERE ARE THEY - AND HOW MANY ARE THERE?

In the year 2023 the denomination had 1,171 church members in 63 churches. Most of these are in the North of England, with others in small groups elsewhere. The full list is given in an appendix at the back of this booklet. The statistics of the churches are gathered annually and these are published in the Annual Meeting Business Handbook.

## WHAT ABOUT OTHER DENOMINATIONS?

The denomination is represented on the appropriate committees of Churches Together in England, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and Free Churches' Group. It is also a member of the Evangelical Alliance. There are links with other organisations at local level.

## CONNEXIONAL SERVICES & ACTIVITIES

The following services are provided by the Connexion's Departments:

### REGISTERED OFFICE and RESOURCE CENTRE

The Registered Office and Resource Centre of the Independent Methodist Association Incorporated, Fleet Street, WIGAN WN5 0DS.

Tel. (01942) 223526

E-mail: resource.centre@imchurches.org.uk

www.imchurches.org.uk



This acts as the hub and centre of all Connexional work. It is responsible for providing a service to the churches by which their material requirements can be met. The Centre: -

- Has a full time Manager who handles enquiries from churches and other bodies.
- Distributes the denominations publications and supplies other publications, audio visual equipment and church furnishings to order.
- Operates a design and printing service for production of church newsletters, posters, circuit plans and other local publications to order.
- Has facilities for committee meetings and small conferences.
- Sends out regular mailings to all the churches, on behalf of Connexional officers and departments.
- The archives are housed at the Resource Centre and can be used to trace many aspects of the history of the Connexion and individual churches. They are also valuable to the family historians.



## LITERATURE

### Connexion Magazine

The periodical journal of the Independent Methodist Connexion is entitled 'Connexion' and is produced bi-monthly. Circulation is about 1,100. It is distributed by the Resource Centre both electronically and hard copy.

Other current publications include:

- Directory (published annually), giving details of Connexional officers, Ministers and churches.
- Christian Foundations

- The Independent Methodists (Published by James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2005). This is the definitive history of the denomination.
- Peter's People
- Model Church Rules
- Baptism Reconsidered
- The Lords Supper
- Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage
- Ministry
- Homosexuality and the Church

## CHURCH SUPPORT GROUP

The Church Support Group section of the Connexion has a wide brief, covering all of church life and aimed at meeting the needs of the local fellowships, such as promoting community activity, evangelism and giving encouragement for the spiritual life in the churches.

The organiser and other team members visit churches on request to discuss local needs. Training can be provided if required.

## OVERSEAS MISSIONS

The Overseas Missions section of the Connexion promotes interest in the spreading of the gospel to people of other lands and generates practical support for such work. There is no Independent Methodist missionary society, but missionaries from member churches of the Connexion work with other missionary societies and receive support from the Connexion.

The department's activities include:

Welcome home and farewell meetings for missionaries before and after their periods of service.

- The 'U4 Mission' project which encourages young people to take an interest in missionary work.
- Liaison with missionary societies.
- Advising and interviewing prospective missionary candidates.
- Organisation of deputation visits for missionaries who are currently at home.
- Raising money to provide financial support for overseas missionary work

