

Charity Investment Fund Manager of the Year 2023 - UK

Since 1996, Epworth Investment Management Ltd has provided its dedicated services to the likes of churches, charities, and, more recently, to private investor clients through its Managed Portfolio Service. The team are stewards of their investors' money and carefully select investments using Christian ethical criteria. We speak to Chief Responsibility Officer, Rev Dr Andrew Harper, who tells us more about the great work done by the team at Epworth.

Epworth is proud to be wholly owned by the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church, founded back in 1960, and they manage c. £1bn of assets. Having a not-for-profit as its parent helps set the company apart from its competitors, especially in a time of market greenwashing and an increase in the perceived mistrust of ESG as an investment mantra. Thanks to the ethical approach adopted by the business, it has stood in good stead for more than 60 years, and the team expect this to continue well into the future. The Christian ethical stance that is offered is unique and allows clients to invest with the confidence that the belief system of the business is built on an openness and transparency with its clients' money.

Andrew reflects that Epworth's ethical approach is regularly fed-back by customers as being a core reason for choosing Epworth. The approach has 4 key elements that starts initially with their Investment Pillars, which drives their investment approach and provides the foundation for everything they do. Secondly, Epworth regularly consult with their client bank over their ethical priorities and these responses are used to prioritise Epworth's investment and engagement focus. Thirdly Epworth have transparent levels of tolerance, which set a demanding bar across investment sectors, so that clients can be confident of what Epworth will and will not be investing in. Finally Epworth have an active engagement and voting strategy as they look to work positively with companies and are committed to improving the ethical performance of the companies they invest in.

With a backdrop of Church customers (since 1960) and Charity customers (since 1996), Epworth has been innovating behind the scenes and developed a

Managed Portfolio Service (MPS) for the private investor. Not only is this a new market for Epworth, but also the UK more widely, as it is the first time a Christian Ethical Investment solution has been launched for individuals. The core mission of Epworth is to be ethical stewards of its clients' money, and now they can share the same consistent approach with private investors, as they have built with church and charity customers so effectively. This mission allows the company to attract employees who are not only experts in their respective fields but are also committed to undertaking rewarding work on behalf of its investors.

To this day, Epworth continues to uphold the same Christian Ethical Stance that was adopted by the CFB, whose ethical investing dates to the 1960s and '70s. Over the past few years, many of the approaches taken by the company have been used by other organisations, such as the Investment Pillars and levels of tolerance, and the company believe the MPS solution is about to be copied in a similar vein. As a result of this continued success, the business stands firmly with its Christian convictions and chooses not to follow other market fads that possess little to no staying power.

Since Epworth is owned by a non-profit statutory body as part of the Methodist Church, any profits are initially used for the benefit of the Church and then for wider mission. The team are aware of the importance of every pound, and thus do not support large dividend pay-outs, excessive bonuses, or lavish office spaces.

For the rest of 2023 and into the near future, the company is focused on around their cash goals, and with the Epworth Cash Plus Fund for Charities currently netting more than 5% interest with same day access, it is a highly attractive



prospect. In addition to this, plans to embed the MPS solution across the UK through the intermediary market are already in place.

There are no lavish plans wider than the current client base, as Epworth is committed to providing the same value for money as always, and not taking on multiple projects that may be as flights of fancy, instead sticking true to its vision of only investing in the most ethically sound, sustainable, and responsible organisations.

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