

My grace is sufficient for you

Methodist Conference, July 2008, Scarborough

World Church and global issues

- The Conference adopted a resolution encouraging the Youth Executive, with the appropriate World Church officers, to highlight the plight of the people of Burma (31/2)
- The Conference adopted (37/8) the International Relief and Development policy set out in Appendix 4 of the Team Focus report (37). This policy seeks to enable the Church to work for maximum impact in ways that draw on Methodism's strengths, values and emphases, while encouraging Methodist people to support the work and campaigns of MRDF and Christian Aid as the principal relief and development agencies of the Methodist Church. Memoranda of Understanding with each of these bodies will seek to ensure that their approaches are complementary.
- The Conference approved the principle of creating the role of Companion to help develop partnerships with overseas Churches. These Companion will be supported by Partnership Co-ordinators and other staff in the Connexional Team dealing with World Church Relationships (37 Appendix 2). The Conference directed the Methodist Council to make appointments of suitable Companions (37/4). These initial appointments will be treated as a pilot and will be reviewed and reported on.
- From September 2009, the *Fund for World Mission* will be known as *The World Mission Fund*.
- The Conference adopted a motion associating itself with the view expressed by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe in condemning the violence around the recent election campaign. It also condemned the failure of Her Majesty's Government to care properly for Zimbabwean refugees in the UK. It encouraged churches to give generously to the Fund for World Mission to help the church in Zimbabwe respond appropriately to humanitarian need, and directed the Connexional Team to prepare resources that would be available to churches and individuals to help people understand the ongoing situation. The offering at the Conference service was dedicated to the purchase of a lorry for the use of the church in Zimbabwe.
- In the Team Focus report, the planned staffing for World Church Relationships and other functions was fully explained.
- During the course of the Conference Communion service the Conference adopted the resolutions necessary to enable The Methodist Church The Gambia to become an autonomous sister Church rather than an overseas district of the British Connexion.

Public issues

Resolutions on Human Sexuality

- The Conference received a report of the consultation about whether or not the Church should revisit the resolutions on Human Sexuality adopted at the Conference in 1993 (51/1). There had been a very high response from both groups and individuals.
- In light of the findings, the Methodist Council had recommended that this was not the right time to revisit the resolutions, and the Conference adopted this recommendation (51/2).
- The Conference agreed that the six Resolutions should no longer be referred to as the *Derby Resolutions*, but as the *1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality*. (51/3)
- The Conference noted the work on Equalities and Diversities and asked for a future report to be made if it should prove to have implications for the 1993 Resolutions. (51/4)
- The Conference also adopted Notice of Motion 107, noting the need to transcend the common habit of discussing the 1993 Resolutions as if they were solely about homosexuality. (51/5)
- The Conference adopted Notice of Motion 109, directing the Methodist Council to consider how resources might be made available to the Church that build on the report *Living with Contradictory Convictions*. (51/6)

Created in God's image

- The Conference had a structured debate on the report of the working group on Human Embryology and Early Human Life, received the report and commended it to Methodist people for reflection and guidance. (19/1)
- It requested the Joint Public Issues Team to produce resources by summer 2009 to enable church groups and individuals to study the issues raised. (19/2)
- The Conference directed the Methodist Council to appoint a group to do further work on the Methodist Statement on Abortion (1976) (19/3).

What has the Church to offer to today's rapidly changing society?

- The Conference experienced a resourced debate, with input on so-called 'gang' culture and youth violence (Winnie Gasa), the contemporary urban scene (Inderjit Bhogal) and rural issues (Stuart Burgess). Following small group discussion a variety of topics were collated and referred to the Methodist Council for consideration. These included:
 - financing church and community initiatives
 - working with partners
 - telling the 'big story'
 - answering the questions people are asking
 - focusing on the good
 - fuel saving
 - social exclusion

- community involvement in circuit events
- being bold with the media
- importing food/local food production – an African example
- challenging pecuniary motivation
- the importance of the family and good parenting models
- Christian lifestyle – living simply
- Using church buildings for community purposes
- Employment, housing costs, debt
- Rural post offices
- Knife crime
- Churches becoming better at campaigning

Resources for the local church

Singing the faith

- The Conference adopted an interim report of the planned new resources for ‘Singing the Faith’, and the results of a survey among churches about current practice (53/1)

Discussions are ongoing about the desirability, feasibility and costs of making words or music available in electronic or printed formats, or both. Around two thirds of the collection will be material that is not included in *Hymns and Psalms*, which will still be widely available. The Music Resources Group will work with the Faith and Order Committee in light of the *Authorisation and Hymnody* report. Detailed costings and final proposals will be brought to the Conference 2009.

- The Conference invited the Methodist Church in Ireland to appoint an additional member of the Music Resources Group (53/2).

Property, grant making processes and funds

- The Conference agreed the temporary suspension of the relevant Standing Orders so that an extended version of the current pilot project on the new ways of giving consent for property schemes to be undertaken could be conducted in 2008/09 (37/6).
- The Conference authorised the appointment of a Connexional Grants Committee, one of whose functions would replace the Resourcing Mission Grants Committee, as set out in Appendix 3 of Agenda Item 37. This will be responsible for all grant-making relating to applications. (Planned service and expense grants will be included in the Connexional Team budget). In the light of significant increases in the amounts of money made available to districts for them to make grants, connexional grants will only be made where the work is of Connexional significance and (if local) cannot currently be supported by local funds. Property grants will be treated separately from a restricted fund, and will not need to meet the ‘connexional significance’ criterion.
- The Conference agreed that from September 2009, the *Fund for Home Mission* will be known as *The Mission in Britain Fund*, the *Fund for World*

Mission will be known as *The World Mission Fund*, the *Connexional Advance and Priority Fund* will be known as *The Connexional Priority Fund* and the *Auxiliary Fund* will be known as *The Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons*.

Future of Methodist Publishing

- The Conference adopted the report and accounts of the Methodist Publishing House (41/2 and 41/2) and also adopted the report from the mph Board and the Methodist Council, which proposed the full integration of the publishing activities of mph into the Connexional Team. In future, this Methodist publishing service will focus on certain core purposes determined in light of the needs of the whole Church. These are defined as:
 - 'official' publications of the Church (eg Minutes of the Conference)
 - books and other publications of an educational nature (theological, biblical, historical and related studies)
 - books and other publications relating to devotional life, learning, social witness, and outreach of Christians both within the Methodist Church and across the wider ecumenical community.
- The Conference appointed the members of the mph Board, which will continue for 12 months, and amended Standing Orders to enable there to be a separate Epworth Press Editorial Committee, which will report to the Council.

Mission matters

Fresh Ways Working Group

- The Conference received a report from the Fresh Ways Working Group, which oversees the priority of developing fresh expressions of Church, and reports annually on progress. (54/1)
- It directed Council to receive and approve guidelines that will be developed by the group. (54/2)
- It commended the report *Mission shaped Church* for study and discussion. (54/3)
- It encouraged every circuit to consider, in the light of this report, the Faith and Order paper *The Missional Nature of the Circuit* (Appendix A, 17, p. 98) and Standing Order 500 (on the nature and purposes of the circuit) how best resources might be provided to develop fresh expressions of Church. (54/4)

Methodist Heritage and Contemporary Mission

- The Conference received a report of a proposed project to develop the work of a range of local Methodist Heritage sites so as to connect these with contemporary mission priorities and opportunities. It approved the creation of a Methodist Heritage Committee and directed the Council to take forward plans for the recruitment of an officer in the Connexional Team and to handle grant requests for interim funding for sites in 2008/09 (34/1,34/2,34/3)

Statistics for Mission

- The Conference received (55/1) a presentation and interpretation of the triennial statistics, by Linda Barley and Nigel Williams. The information about Methodist statistics was compared with other demographic statistics.

Growing aspects of the Methodist Church are:

- one quarter of congregations are growing
- midweek church attendance is up
- there are more mature baptisms (13+)
- Methodist scouting is growing.

An assurance was given that this presentation would be available on powerpoint for reporting back to districts and circuits.

Joint Implementation Commission

- The Conference received the report *Embracing the Covenant* and commended it to the Methodist people for study, action and response, to be undertaken whenever possible with representatives of the Church of England and other partner Churches (46/1 and 46/2).
- It requested the Council to ensure that it is studied in districts, circuits and churches and that responses be sent to the Assistant Secretary of Conference by 31st December 2009. (46/3)
- The Conference thanked the current members of JIC for their work, endorsed the recommendations for the next phase, and approved the list of Methodist members of the JIC 2008-13, with Peter Howdle continuing as co-chair. (46/4, 46/5, 46/6 and 46/7).

Young People

Youth Conference

- Youth Conference proposed the Burma resolution 31/2, mentioned above.
- The Conference received the report of the Youth Conference (31/1) and in particular debated in a lively way the following resolution which was adopted (31/3):
 - the Conference calls upon churches across the Connexion to have Bible in appropriate translations and formats available to give to new Christians and those seeking to know more about the Christian faith.
- After a structured debate which included input about young people and violence, the Conference directed the Methodist Council to establish and support a new project led by young people and resourced if possible by ecumenical and statutory bodies, to investigate the roles that Local Churches can play in addressing the issues which create and result in youth violence (31/4).

Outreach to young people

- The Conference received NOM 202, urging each circuit to invest in a new project to reach out to, and stand alongside, young people. The Conference referred the NOM to the Methodist Council for report to Conference 2009.

Youth Participation Strategy

- Conference received a report from the Steering group of the Youth Participation Strategy, and endorsed the report's recommendations for a five year connexional pilot for a youth participation strategy, beginning with an initial roll-out in 2008/09. The Strategy was supported by the Methodist Council and by the Methodist Youth Conference. There will be seven Regional Participation Officers linked to the Methodist Training Forums, and a network of part-time district youth enablers (aged 16-23), each working for a year. Connexionally there will be three staff: one to manage the programme, another to focus on children's participation and a third to be an equalities and diversities development worker.
- Conference endorsed the setting up of a Youth Participation Strategy Group and directed it to report annually to Conference, liaising with the Faith and Order Committee to develop appropriate theological resourcing for the strategy, with a full evaluation report in 2011.

Ministerial conditions

Stationing Review Group

- The Conference received the report of the Stationing Review Group, which had gone through a very thorough process of consultation and revision. (48/1)
- The Conference then adopted recommendations 1,2 and 24, which it regarded as 'aspirational'. These are about:
 - openness to hearing a call
 - recognising what presbyters should be released to do
 - ecumenical collaboration when reorganisation is happening
- The Conference also adopted recommendations 8, 11 and 20, which it regarded as in line with existing practice. These are about:
 - a mixed economy approach to stationing
 - stationing should remain an annual cycle
 - affirming 'Mapping the Way Forward', the creation of fewer circuits and 'new ways of being circuit'
- The Conference then referred all the other recommendations included on p.488-523 to the Methodist Council and the Stationing Committee to bring an integrated and prioritised plan to the Conference 2009, or where practical to proceed to implementation. These are about:
 - the implications of being a movement, and a spirituality of being God's people in a Methodist way
 - team ministries

- a more open, formal and explicit process of developing those with the potential for leadership
 - distinctive needs for lay ministry in rural areas
 - deliberately planning for a vacancy
 - each district having a number or proportion of posts to be filled by advertisement
 - flexibility about the invitation process for presbyters
 - full itinerancy no longer practical
 - aligning diaconal and presbyteral stationing
 - establishment figures to be counted at district level
 - permitting applications as well as nominations to the post of District Chair
 - Stationing Action Group to deal with stationing matters between Conferences
 - Grant applications to be received before posts are advertised
 - Island district posts to be dealt with in first round
 - Single and two station circuits to cease
 - Churches working together for effective mission
 - Circuits as trustees for local Churches
 - Whether or not the Methodist Church can cover all regions
 - Ecumenical negotiations about one effective presence in a particular rural place, and about the whole shape of Christian presence in our nations and islands
 - Encouraging young people's call to ordained ministry
 - Recognising and training for focused callings
 - Active supernumeraries – a register and clearing house
 - Common initial training/ specialist preparation/ longer term review
 - Supervision in initial appointments
 - Validated training programme for superintends
 - Opportunities for developing scope of diaconal ministry
 - Training for rural areas
- In adopting Notice of Motion 111, the Conference added a further recommendation to the list of those referred to the Council, to the effect that a fresh piece of work on our distinctive understanding of Lay Ministry should be commissioned and brought to a future Conference.
 - The Conference directed the Council to establish the effects of using maximum flexibility with regard to the upper end of the age scale in candidates, so that this could be made clear to candidates before the Connexional Candidates Committee 2009.

Signalling Vocation, clarifying identity

- The Conference agreed (52/1,52/2 and 52/3) that throughout the Church, formally and informally, we would commit ourselves to use the following terminology:
 - 'presbyters' and 'deacons' when specifically referring to those in full Connexion in those roles

- 'minister' when we mean an ordained person, irrespective of whether they are a presbyter or a deacon.

Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme

- The Conference noted the pension increase to be made from 1 September 2009 and appointed various Directors (26/1, 26/2, 26/3, 26/4).
- The Conference was warned that in view of the changing economic climate and the revaluation of the pensions assets, it would be prudent to plan for a 5% increase in contributions to the pension scheme from September 2009.

Complaints and Discipline

- The Conference received an update about the changes to the Complaints and Discipline process which had been agreed last year (66). From September 2008, a Connexional panel replaces the previous district panels for formal complaints, and legally qualified advocates will be available for both parties in a complaint. However there will be more emphasis on mediation prior to moving to a formal process.

Developing best practice

With Integrity and Skill

- The Conference received a report (18/1) of the Confidentiality and Pastoral Care Task Group, which looked at the changing context with regard to best practice in pastoral care, in relation to the issue of confidentiality.
- It also adopted the recommendations of the report, namely:
 - to recommend the report to pastoral committees, circuit staff, leadership team meetings and synods, and as a resource to aid in the development of local pastoral policies
 - that the guidelines on confidentiality (section 12) should be included in the guidance section of the CRD
 - that they should appear on the Methodist Church website
 - that a working party be formed to develop a code of ethics for lay and ordained in pastoral roles
 - that probationers should receive information about models of pastoral supervision when they are stationed
 - that the Methodist Council explore developing personal files for presbyters and deacons
 - that a short guidance document for churches and circuits be drawn up concerning best practice in retaining records, and made available by the Conference 2009
 - that the Faith and Order Committee be invited to consider whether now is the time to develop a theological statement on the nature of Pastoral Care in the Methodist Church and to bring its preliminary response to the Conference 2009.

Equalities and Diversities

- The Conference received a report of the work of the Equalities and Diversity project, and commended the EQUALLY DIFFERENT campaign which will provide both online and printed resources for use in local churches, circuits and districts. (50/1 and 50/2)
- An Equalities and Diversities workshop was held and was attended by over 100 participants, and there were several fringe hearings on different areas of inclusion during the week.
- The Conference endorsed the staffing recommendations and gave thanks to God for all who had pioneered work in this area over the years.
- NOM 104 was adopted. This lists some key theological themes as an indicative but not prescriptive guide to the Faith and Order Committee for future theological reflection.
- The Conference adopted as 50/5 the recognition that there may very occasionally be instances when a conflict might arise between legal obligations and Christian convictions, and directed the Methodist Council to ensure that there is practical expert help available to support any Methodist body involved in a potential conflict.

Stirring up the spark of grace – Connexional Training Strategies

- The Conference received the report of the Training Strategy and Resources Executive. This included three key principles:
 - offering all learners opportunities to develop in godly knowledge, practice and character within the Christian community
 - integrating all kinds of training and learning for lay and ordained
 - structuring the provision of training and learning resources so as best to serve the mission of the Church as a whole.
- It reported on a variety of decisions and initiatives:
- A connexional on-line resource for learning and development is planned
 - Support for post-graduate study and post-doctoral research fellowships of demonstrable benefit to the Church
 - Funding for training institution staff to acquire Higher Education teaching qualification
 - Training in work-related supervision of professional practice for those engaged in lay and ordained ministry
 - Training for superintendency
 - Publicity and online material for Extending Discipleship, Exploring Vocation
 - Consultation on pioneer ministries and ministries with specific ethnic, cultural or linguistic communities
 - The ending of the TDO scheme and the plans for Training Officers and District Development Enablers
 - The Annual Development Review pilots
 - The Lay Ministry Orientation Programme
 - A new Worship Leaders' course in preparation

- Different ways of delivering Faith and Worship for Local Preacher training
- The remit of the TSRE.
- The Conference adopted NOM 113 which specified that Candidating portfolios that had been marked Connexionally should also be used at District and a Connexional Committees as a candidate is examined.

Connexional Team and Conference

Team Focus and staffing

- The Conference received the report of progress made on the Team Focus proposals adopted in 2008, including details of strategies for fresh engagement in local work with Under 19s, and thanked the staff and all who had contributed to the process. (37/1 and 37/2, and NOM 104). Staff were explicitly prayed for at the end of the debate.
- The Conference ratified the decision of the Methodist Council to reverse its previous decision about the employment of Training Officers and District Development Enablers (37/5). These staff will be employed by the Methodist Council but are not members of the Connexional Team.
- The Conference noted and endorsed the augmented role as Assistant Secretary of Conference agreed by the Council for the Revd Kenneth G Howcroft up to 2010. (37/3).
- Appreciations were expressed for the work of David Deeks, Peter Sulston, Jonathan Kerry and Anthea Cox, who will be retiring or moving on from their work in the team.
- Legal matters were resolved about the succession to the office of Coordinating Secretary. In particular the General Secretary/Secretary of Conference may delegate to named other people authority for specific purposes, or any of the functions allocated to him or her under standing orders as Secretary of Conference or any of his or her formal responsibilities as General Secretary. A list of all such delegations will be prepared and maintained.
- The Conference adopted the Connexional Team Workplan and Budget, with the correction of one figure. (39/2)

The review of the Conference

- The Conference received the report of the review group and adopted the recommendations in paragraphs 5-25 of report 33, with the following amendments:
 - the minimum number of deacons who are full members of the Conference will be reduced to 14, but one of these must be the Warden
 - all District Chairs should continue to be full members of the Conference (the recommendations of the Review Group about co-Chairs were not accepted, and the Conference directed the Council to review this matter and report no later than 2012, after the review of the Districts planned in *Mapping the Way Forward*).

The Faith and Order Committee

- The Conference received a summary of recent Faith and Order work.
- It authorised for use the service of *Recognition of those authorised as lay people to preside at the Lord's Supper*.
- It received a report that a group would be working on Membership (in response to Memorial 55 (2007) and would report to the Conference 2009
- It adopted a statement on the status of liturgical texts, which may be:
 - Authorised (normative texts expressing the doctrinal/liturgical mind of the Conference)
 - commended for use (texts scrutinised by the Faith and Order Committee)
 - received for use (texts reviewed by members of the Worship and Liturgy Resources Group).
- It received a report on Extended Communion
- The Conference received a report on the new ways of working of the Faith and Order Committee, through twelve resource groups in addition to the central Committee:
 - Bible
 - Ecumenism
 - Doctrine and theology (historical and global)
 - Inter-Faith
 - Methodism: ethos, history and theology
 - Ministry Issues
 - Missiology and Evangelism
 - Pastoral Issues
 - Social and Political Issues
 - Theological Education and Communication
 - Worship and Liturgy
 - Interface (apologetics and engagement with culture)

A volunteer agreement with members of these groups was appended.

Notes JM/KH 18/07/08