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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2018 Methodist Conference

The 2018 Methodist Conference, University of Nottingham: Presbyteral Session 28-29 June; Representative Session 30 June-5 July.
www.methodist.org.uk/conference

Presidential addresses

The Revd Michaela A Youngson was inducted as President and Mr Bala Gnanapragasam as Vice-President of the Conference. 'Radical Grace' was the theme chosen by the President for her address, with the Vice-President exploring 'Transforming Hope' in his address.

- You can download and read the President's address in full here: bit.ly/presaddress18
- You can download and read the Vice-President's address in full here: bit.ly/vpaddress18

Ordinations of presbyters and deacons

38 presbyters and five deacons were received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning during Conference Worship, along with four presbyters by transfer. Later that day ordination services took place in seven venues across the region.

Ministry in the Methodist Church

This major report considered the nature and understanding of ministry within the Church and how this might change in the future. It included a draft Conference Statement setting out the Church's understanding of ministry, as well as a discussion of questions raised in recent years and on which further work is being done. The draft Statement will now be made available widely for study and discussion, before a final version is brought for approval to the Conference in 2020.

Mission and Ministry in Covenant

The Conference, in receiving a report that had been welcomed by the Church of England's General Synod in February, directed further work be undertaken on proposals for bringing the Methodist Church and the Church of England into closer communion with one another. A report will be brought to the 2019 Conference. The Bishop of Aston, the Rt Revd Anne Hollinghurst, and the Bishop of Carlisle, the Rt Revd James Newcombe, addressed the Conference.

The Revd Hollinghurst said: "I believe the proposals would take down barriers between us without weakening the boundaries that give our two Churches their distinctive shape, and their distinctive life in the family of faith."

The Reader's Guide about the proposals can be downloaded here: bit.ly/MaMIC-guide

Marriage and Relationships

The Marriage and Relationships Task Group delivered an interim report and the Conference agreed a change to the way in which the group will complete its work. After discussion of issues raised by the draft report in workshops, and long and respectful debate on the floor of the Conference, the Task Group will produce a further report containing a number of key theological arguments and recommendations. This report will be brought to the 2019 Conference and, subject to acceptance, will be referred to the District Synods of the Church for a year-long process of consideration. The 2020 Conference will then make a final decision, with any provision implemented with immediate effect.

Training and the Learning Network

The Conference received a report from the Methodist Council on the shape and nature of training in the Methodist Church. It affirmed the importance of Circuits supporting formation and learning as part of a 'learning Church' and noted work already being undertaken to revise ways of working within the Learning Network and to redefine regional forums. The Ministries Committee will give further consideration to increasing the initial period of ministerial formation, while the Secretary of the Conference will take forward discussions with centres of scholarship outside of our current training institutions.

The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory is the 10th report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the Roman Catholic Church. It investigates how Catholics and Methodists understand "the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life." The Conference commended the report to the Methodist people for study and discussion. A copy is available from the WMC website: bit.ly/call-to-holiness

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The annual children and youth assembly, which continues to grow, received agreement from the Conference to encourage all churches, Circuits and Districts to engage in the Year of Testimony in 2019/2020, recognising the importance of speaking about God, faith and of sharing stories. The Conference also urged churches to build relationships with MPs to explore issues of justice and social action, and for every District to commit to an action to challenge injustice which will be shared with the wider Connexion.

Connexional finances and allowances

The Conference received the Statement of Connexional Finances for 2016/2017 and adopted the Connexional Central Services Budget for three years commencing 2018/2019, which covers all planned income to, and expenditure from, the connexionally-held funds that are administered via the Methodist Council. The budget for income in 2018/2019 is £37.2m and the expenditure £42.7m, a net deficit of almost £5.5m. This reflects a deliberate policy of reducing reserves on some funds by releasing additional amounts for grants.

The Revd Tim Swindell, Connexional Treasurer, told the Conference that £370m was held in reserves by Districts, Circuits and churches, the equivalent of £80,000 for each church or £1 million for each Circuit. He added that the Church needed a "new generation of Christian entrepreneurs," who are willing to "take a risk to invest and share in the gospel."

Mr Swindell referred to the summary *Review of the Year 2016/2017* which can be read and downloaded here: bit.ly/mc-review-16-17

- The Methodist Church Fund (MCF) assessment for 2018/2019 is budgeted at £13.4m, in line with a previous decision to restrict increases to 1% per annum.
- Using the formula agreed by the Conference, the level of increase in the standard stipend will be 2.55%.

The Methodist Council

The Council is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to advise on changes to make the work of the Church more effective, and to give it spiritual leadership. Along with other matters detailed in this Digest, the Council reported to the Conference and received its approval as necessary for the following:

- Methodist Church House in London will be rebuilt at an estimated cost of £22.5m, to be self-financing and funded from a bank loan.
- Grants from the Joseph Rank Trust totalling £556,500 had been received in 2017, for which the gratitude of the Church was expressed.
- The Methodist Schools Committee was tasked to develop a schools' educational strategy for the Church, reporting to the Conference in 2020.
- Additional legal and property support will be made available for managing trustees, through measures including changes within the Connexional Team and to the working practices of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP).

Safeguarding

The Safeguarding Committee reported a move towards the completion of the last remaining cases from the Past Cases Review (PCR) and also on the restructuring of the team to deliver a new professional casework supervision structure for District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs). Support to individuals continues in a number of ways including casework, professional counselling and formal responses.

Ministries Committee

The Conference adopted a report proposing increased flexibility in the training of worship leaders and a 'peer review' of all local preachers every three years. In light of a review on the purpose, frequency and duration of ministerial sabbaticals, the Conference determined that a minister's first sabbatical should be taken after seven years rather than ten. An update was provided on proposals for local lay ministry to be supported by training offered under the Apprenticeship scheme, along with updates on Fresh Expressions and Venture FX.

District Reviews

The Conference approved a process for District Reviews directing that the process should have appropriate links to support the development of district mission plans. The proposed outline, which affords flexibility depending on the local context, is for each District to undertake a review every three to five years.

Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI)

JACEI reported that much of its work over the past year has been to tackle the ongoing issue of climate change, and that further work has been undertaken on tax justice, modern slavery and the welfare of farm animals.

A specific report outlined the Central Finance Board's (CFB) methodology to assess businesses against the Paris Agreement on climate change, to help decide on further engagement or potential disinvestment.

Faith and Order

The Conference adopted a policy stating that those presiding at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are not permitted to invite participation through electronic means, such as the Internet or social media. Faith and Order will continue to look at the theology of online life and Christian experience. The committee also reported that it had now produced alternative liturgical resources for baptism, available from the Methodist website: bit.ly/additional-liturgies

Memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion.

This year the Conference considered and replied to 28 Memorials on topics including:

- Lessening the burden of the annual submission of figures for the reporting of Statistics for Mission.
- Urging Methodists to engage with the Community Sponsorship programme to offer sanctuary to families from Syria.
- Calling on the British government to cease arms sales to Saudi Arabia and for a solution to the war in Yemen.
- For the Methodist Church to reduce its use of plastic.
- A reaffirmation of the Church's abhorrence of anti-Semitism, noting the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Christians and Jews.

Notices of Motion

The Conference debated and adopted a variety of Notices of Motion (items of business put forward during the Conference) including:

- Reviewing Standing Orders relating to the role and training of church stewards and lay leaders.
- Identifying possible pilot projects for ministerial training on local courses.
- Identifying key issues to ensure that people who are intersex or transgender are included within the life of the Church.
- Asking individuals, churches and the Methodist Council to lobby Parliament about the injustices caused by the Universal Credit System.
- Scrutinising circuit profiles so that they better meet the needs of the Connexion; dealing with broader stationing issues; ensuring coherence with the new Connexional Finance Strategy.
- Expressing deep concern at the sharp increase in rough sleeping and homelessness in the UK. Evidence will be gathered from Districts on the responses from Methodists which will be reported at Spring Synods and via the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT).
- Expressing outrage that human trafficking still exists, allowing humans to be traded even in the UK. The Methodist Council will appoint a task group with JPIT to review existing resources on the issue and to produce new ones.
- Making prayer resources available for churches for September's UN meeting about refugees and displaced people.

- Writing to the Israeli Ambassador demanding that the Israeli Army observe international law with regards to firing on unarmed civilians; for church members to contact their MPs asking for the blockade of Gaza to end and for the Israeli Government to adhere to international law with regard to protests; to observe the World Methodist Council's seven days of prayer for Gaza and the Holy Land (1-7 July).

Notable anniversaries

- This year is MHA's 75th anniversary and activities are taking place to celebrate this. A Service of Thanksgiving will be held in Derby Cathedral on Saturday 13 October 2018.
- In 2016/2017, All We Can estimated that 922,507 people had benefited directly or indirectly from its development programmes, with 71,887 receiving emergency assistance including food, medicine and shelter. All We Can increased its income by 26% in 2016/2017 to £3.011m, of which 82.6% was spent on charitable activities.
- A video was shown to the Conference highlighting the work of Methodist Ministers' Housing Society (MMHS) which is celebrating its 70th anniversary. Worship resources, including a new hymn, are available from mmhs.org.uk/worship

Reaffirming Our Calling

The Conference heard that during the last year the Methodist Council, the Connexional Leaders' Forum and the Strategy and Resources Committee had considered how *Our Calling* could be reaffirmed and used as the basis for the shaping of Connexional priorities.

A discussion paper arising from this work was shared and the Conference went into groups to consider: new ideas; the Methodist Way of Life; the development and implementation of Circuit Mission Plans; a review of the patterns and models of trusteeship; what the Methodist Council might need to provide to enable new work to develop.

The Revd Canon Gareth J Powell, Secretary of the Conference, said: "We hope that the affirmation of the Conference will continue to influence and steer the thinking of bodies such as the Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee in the course of the next year, to ensure that our decision-making and thinking is entirely rooted in the life of God and that our choices are made in light of the need to be a faithful people of Christ today."

- To find out more about *Our Calling*, including a new film that can be shared with churches and Circuit Meetings, please visit www.methodist.org.uk/ourcalling
- Posters and banners are available from Methodist Publishing www.mph.org.uk

The 2019/2020 President and Vice President

The Conference designated the Revd Dr Barbara C Glasson to be the President and Professor Clive Marsh to be the Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2019/2020.

Appointments and concluding business

The Conference appointed the Revd Richard M Andrew as Chair for the Darlington District from 1 September 2018, and the Revd Helen R Kirk as Chair for the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District, the Revd Kerry W Tankard as Chair for the Yorkshire West District and the Revd S Mark Slaney as Chair for the Shetland and Scotland District from 1 September 2019.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Birmingham from 27 June – 4 July 2019, and in Telford from 25 June – 2 July 2020.


The Methodist Church

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