

Conference Business Digest

**The 2017 Methodist Conference, Birmingham Hilton Metropole, NEC.
Presbyteral Session 22-23 June, Representative Session 24-29 June.
www.methodist.org.uk/conference**

Presidential addresses



The induction of the new President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference took place during the opening of the Representative Session.

In her Presidential address, the Revd Loraine N Mellor (left) asked: "How are we disturbing the present in the Church today?" as she shared her concerns for the current state of the Church and her vision for taking radical risks to change its culture.

Jill Baker, the Vice-President, reflected on the need for both laughter and lament in the Church's life, calling upon her own experiences.

You can read the President's address in full here:

<http://bit.ly/Lets-change>

You can read the Vice-President's address in full here:

<http://bit.ly/laughter-and-lament>

Ministerial Code of Conduct

The Conference commended the draft Ministerial Code of Conduct for wide consultation across the Connexion. The draft code of conduct can be read on this PDF:

<http://bit.ly/2tVuHhm>

Connexional finances and allowances

The Conference adopted the Connexional Central Services Budget for 2017-18, 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 2017-18 is £36.6m and the

expenditure £41.3m, a net deficit of almost £4.7m. This reflects in part a deliberate policy of reducing reserves on some funds by releasing additional amounts for grants.

The Methodist Church Fund (MCF) assessment is budgeted at £17.2m. District allocations can be found on this PDF <http://bit.ly/2tPJWaC>

Using the formula agreed by the Conference, the level of increase in the standard stipend will be 1.6%.

The Assistant Secretary of the Conference

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Conference from 1 September 2017.

Trained at Wesley House Cambridge, Jonathan has served in the Leighton Buzzard and Stewkley Circuit and the Redcar, Saltburn and Guisborough Circuit, as Superintendent of the Horncastle and Bardney Circuit, and has most recently been Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries.



Ordinations of presbyters and deacons

After the Reception into Full Connexion on Sunday morning during Conference Worship, seven Ordination Services took place in Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull and Shirley.

Mission and Ministry in Covenant

The Conference discussed in workshops a set of proposals which would make the ministries of the Methodist Church and the Church of England interchangeable.

The proposals were included in the report *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* which was produced by the Faith and Order bodies of both Churches in response to an earlier direction of the Conference and the General Synod. Under the plans, a development from the Anglican-Methodist Covenant made in 2003, a Methodist

“president-bishop” would be appointed and ordained. The report stressed that the structural unity of each Church would remain, as would each other’s “distinctive form of church polity”.

The proposals require approval from both the General Synod and the Conference, and plans for formal discussion will be presented to the 2018 Conference for debate and decision.

Safeguarding implementation - Past Cases Review

The Conference noted that significant progress has been made on implementing all 23 recommendations from the 2015 Past Cases Review (PCR) into non-recent abuse.

A change of culture within the Church is becoming increasingly apparent. Almost 80% of the 1,885 cases which came to light as part of the PCR have now been completed and it is hoped that outstanding cases will be completed later this year.

The Past Cases Review Implementation Group handed over responsibility for ongoing safeguarding work to the Church’s Safeguarding Committee.

Supervision

A programme of supervision, with one-to-one support for ordained ministers, the first of its kind from a mainstream UK Christian denomination, has been confirmed by the Methodist Conference.

Supervision of those engaged in pastoral work, and particularly for ordained ministers, was recommended by the Methodist Church’s Past Case Review as a way to increase support and accountability for safe practice. Supervision will take place within the Districts with Chairs, Superintendents and those nominated to undertake the supervision receiving appropriate training. Supervision will take place at six one-to-one meetings throughout the year and it is intended for all ministers to have been in supervision for at least six months by 2020.

3Generate’s continued growth



The Methodist Youth President, Tim Annan, told the Conference about the continued growth of the Church’s annual gathering for young people and adults aged 8–23, including a move to a new venue to meet increasing numbers.

3Generate will move to Pontins in Southport in November to accommodate more than 900 young people and leaders – a massive growth in the five years of the event.

The Conference directed the Methodist Council to

work with the Joint Public Issues Team to produce resources for local churches and Circuits to use with children and young people so that they can get involved effectively in issues of social justice. The Conference also encouraged local churches and Circuits to engage positively with Mental Health Awareness Week.

The Gift of Connexionalism

The Conference reaffirmed the importance of being an interdependent and diverse Church.

In a report entitled ‘The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century’, the Conference discussed and upheld the fundamental importance of connexionalism to how Methodists understand their own identity.

Originally referring to the way in which individuals, societies and preachers were “in connexion with” John Wesley, connexionalism has developed significant and theological meaning for Methodists, being elaborated and expressed through hymns, liturgy and the constitution of the Church as well as in the faith and practice of the Methodist people.

The Conference adopted the report and commended it for study and reflection throughout the Connexion. A PDF of the report including some questions for consideration can be found here:

<http://bit.ly/2sFHHaF>

Statistics for Mission

The Conference received a report setting out a 3.5% year-on-year decline in membership over the past decade, with the number of members standing at 188,000. The triennial statistics also revealed that engagement in local churches through cafes, clubs, alternative forms of church and other bodies reached 500,000 people each week.



Mr Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary, presenting the report said: “While it does make for a challenging read, it’s important to remember that membership figures alone don’t tell the whole story. Across the country, thousands of Methodist communities are impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every week in a wide variety of ways.”

The Conference discussed the report in District workshops and adopted a Notice of Motion calling:

- Methodist members to enthusiasm in prayer and acts of personal evangelism;
- Methodist churches to direct their work and wealth to the priority of making new disciples;
- Methodist Circuits to resource the forming of new Methodist societies wherever possible, to

offer witness and worship in new places, or in places where Christian presence has long since diminished;

- Methodist Districts to include disciple-making as a priority for forthcoming synods.

Two further Notices of Motion, aimed at furthering the mission of the Church, were also adopted:

- Each year, every Church Council was encouraged to address and answer the question 'do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?', with the answer to be presented to the Circuit Meeting in order to aid its wider, strategic, oversight of mission and ministry. This Notice of Motion was also referred for further consideration to the Methodist Council which will report back to the 2018 Conference.
- The Conference recognised the challenges and changes facing all communities in the UK and the urgent call on the Methodist people to share the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and action. Every local church was asked to launch the new Connexional year with a day of prayer and fasting. The Methodist Council was asked to ensure that the Connexional Team promote such a day with appropriate resources.

- **Read *The state of the work of God, reflections of the Secretary of the Conference on the triennial Statistics for Mission report on the Conference pages of the Methodist website, <http://bit.ly/2sKpIQd>, or on the Wesley's Horse blog, wesleyshorse.org.uk***

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Conference passed a resolution that confessed the sin of racism and, in confessing that sin, recognised the considerable amount of work still required by the Connexion in order to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The Conference urged all churches, Circuits, Districts and Connexional bodies to engage with the EDI Toolkit and to take steps to enable the Church to become a 'more inclusive and multicultural community of faith'. It also directed the Methodist Council to guide the development and implementation of measurable and time-bound plans to increase participation and inclusion, backed up by a progress report to the 2018 Conference.

- **To find out about the work of the committee and to download the toolkit, please visit the EDI pages of the Methodist Church website: bit.ly/methodist-EDI**

Fossil fuels

The Conference called for divestment by the Church from fossil fuel companies that do not align with the Paris Agreement (the accord agreed in 2015 within a United Nations framework to limit the global temperature rise caused by greenhouse gases). A report on so-called extractive industries will be brought to the Conference in 2018 with the expectation that divestment will then follow by 2020 from companies whose business plans are not aligned with the Paris targets.

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 brought resolutions and reports to the Conference about the following areas of work:

- The employer level of pension contributions for lay employees remaining as a minimum of 6% of salary but with new options for employee contributions;
- Joint Public Issues Team research into fracking and the creation of suitable resources for use by the Connexion;
- Research into the positive impact of the *Mapping a Way Forward, Regrouping for Mission* process.
- The Accessibility to the Conference Working Party which looked at improving accessibility to the Conference including knowledge of procedures, how business is transacted, patterns of worship, the venue, use of technology and the length and make-up of the Conference. The group's work will now be considered by the Conference Business Committee;
- The follow up to *Larger Than Circuit* where it was agreed that no further work should be carried out on considering the title of District Chair; and an undertaking to establish a peer review process for Districts, similar to the model currently used by the Church of England;
- The reconfiguring and renaming of Yorkshire Districts to three Districts called Yorkshire North and East, Yorkshire West and Sheffield;
- Grants from the Joseph Rank Trust to the Methodist Church in Britain totalling more than £650,000.

Religious freedom in Sri Lanka

The Conference noted the deteriorating situation regarding religious freedom in Sri Lanka. Support and solidarity was offered to the people of the South Asian nation and to the Methodist Church there, along with a call on the British Government to make urgent

representations to the Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister to urge restraint, uphold the freedoms of Sri Lankans of all faiths, and take actions to protect its citizens and bring the perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence to justice; and a call to the Methodist people to hold Sri Lanka in prayer and to act for justice, peace and freedom.

Notices of Motion

The Conference adopted a variety of other Notices of Motion on issues including:

- As 'Brexit' negotiations get underway, the anxiety of many living in the UK and in Europe for their futures was noted, and concern was expressed for the way in which the EU referendum and its aftermath have exposed significant divisions both within the UK and between the UK and the rest of Europe. Methodists and others were asked to make representations to their MPs and MEPs asking the UK Government and EU to finalise, as a matter of urgency, the future rights of EU citizens;
- A call to Methodists to challenge Sainsbury's intended move to drop the globally recognised FAIRTRADE mark from Sainsbury's products and replace it with the phrase 'fairly-traded', meaning products will not need to adhere to globally-recognised standards;
- A call to churches and Circuits to build relationships with people of all faiths, especially from the Islamic community, following recent terrorist attacks, with the aim of creating more open, tolerant and inclusive communities;
- To protect local churches from unforeseen risks and challenges, applications to the National Lottery for grants of more than £10,000 now require approval from Circuit Meetings, and for applications of more than £50,000 additional approval is required from the District Policy Committee;
- A call to MHA (formerly Methodist Homes for the Aged) to explore ways to respond to the growing need to receive couples into care when one partner may not be eligible for local authority support, to offer shared accommodation where one partner is in a caring role, and more generally to enable married couples to keep together. While not just applicable to ministerial couples, particular concern was expressed for supernumerary ministers and their spouses.
- The 50th Anniversary of the Concordat linking the United Methodist Church and the Methodist Church in Britain which will be celebrated with a recommitment of the bonds between the two traditions at a conference on 11 August 2018, followed by an act of worship at Methodist Central Hall Westminster on 12 August 2018.

- Encouragement for Methodists to participate with Movement Day, 6-7 October 2017 at Methodist Central Hall Westminster, London - a gathering of church leaders and practitioners to consider the transformation of towns and cities. Ministers were asked to consider who could attend and the benefits participation could offer.

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 39 Memorials on topics including:

- Reaffirmation of the Church's commitment to peace and justice for all the peoples of Israel/Palestine, in the context of the centenary of the Balfour Declaration;
- How reserves can be best used to provide local resourcing for mission;
- The 50th anniversary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) consultation on racism and the Church's continued role in opposing racism in all its forms;
- Opportunities to house Syrian refugees within manse and to seek a compassionate response from the UK government for those displaced and seeking refuge in the UK;
- Participation in the WCC World Mission Conference in Tanzania on mission and evangelism, with feedback to the 2018 Conference;
- Concerns of chaplains working in education regarding the anti-radicalisation programme *Prevent*. These will be considered by JPIT and the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group, with outcomes informing the concerns to be shared with the UK government;
- A call for the government to restore confidence in its commitment to multilateral disarmament at this year's High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament. New resources have been published by the Joint Public Issues Team on the issue which are available here: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking.

The Training Review

The Conference received a summary from the Strategy and Resources Committee of a confidential report from the Training Review Group, noting the achievements of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) and the changing nature of the training needs of the Church, and briefly summarising those points

in the report to which the Methodist Council had responded warmly or with concern. The Conference expressed concern at the lack of detail before it and adopted a Notice of Motion calling for a fuller report to be presented to the 2018 Conference which would consider what provisions should be implemented.

DSO supervision and calculating hours

In response to a resolution passed in 2016, the Conference received a paper setting out a proposed approach to the professional supervision of District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs). It directed the Methodist Council to produce detailed and costed proposals for this supervision, based on the work done to date. The Conference also adopted a method for calculating the hours of work needed for DSOs in each District. Included in the calculations are basic duties, the size of local churches and the size of the District, training commitments and external relationships. The new method should provide better resourcing and consistency across the Connexion for the Church to fulfil its core mission of providing safe environments for all.

Conference worship collection

The offertory taken during the Conference Worship raised £6,488 for the World Mission Fund, including Gift Aid.

The 2018/2019 President and Vice President

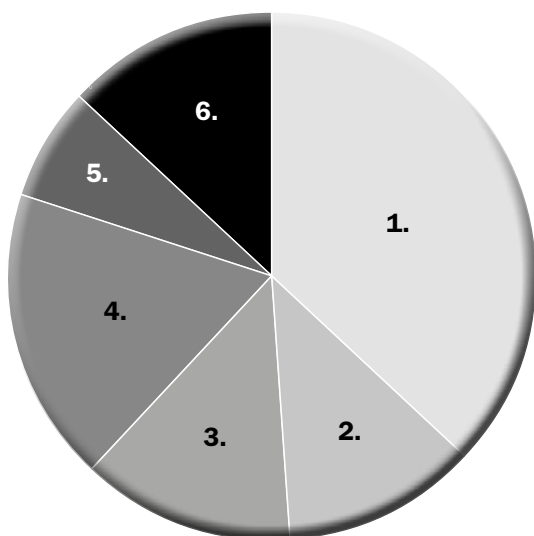


The Conference designated the Revd Michaela Youngson to be President and Bala Gnanapragasam to be Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2018/2019. The President-Designate is one of the Chairs of the London District. The Vice-President-Designate is a Representative from the London District to the Conference. He serves on the boards of Christian Aid and MHA, is a trustee of the London HIV/Aids Chaplaincy and was the first Synod Secretary for the unified London District.

Future dates of the Conference

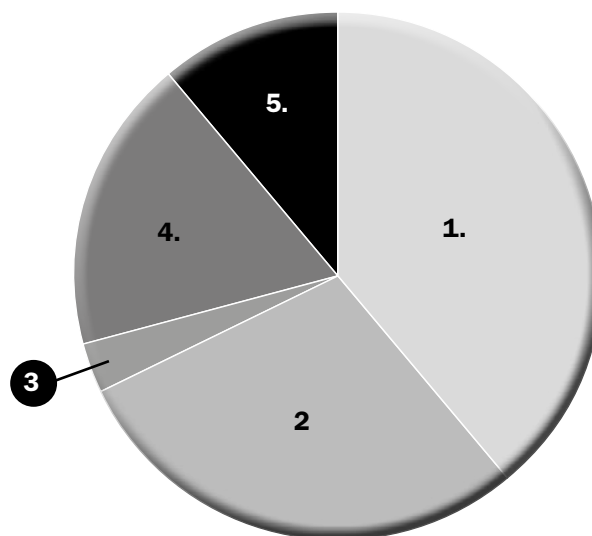
The Methodist Conference will meet in Nottingham from 28 June – 5 July in 2018, and in Birmingham from 27 June – 4 July in 2019.

2017/18 Budget - £000s
Total income £36.564m



- 1. District assessment £13,529**
- 2. Donations and legacies £4,327**
- 3. Investments and rents £4,922**
- 4. Property levies £6,500**
- 5. Other income £2,579**
- 6. Internal movements £4,707**

2017/18 Budget - £000s
Total expenditure £41.263m



- 1. Grants £15,999**
- 2. Staff costs and stipends £11,954**
- 3. Mission Partners £1,219**
- 4. Overheads and other costs £7,385**
- 5. Internal movements £4,707**