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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2022 Methodist Conference

The 2022 Methodist Conference, held in Telford: Presbyteral Session 23-24 June; Representative Session 25-30 June.
www.methodist.org.uk/conference

Election and Induction of the President and Vice-President

On Saturday 25 June, the Revd Graham Thompson was elected and inducted as President of the Conference, and Anthony Boateng as Vice-President. In his Conference address, Mr Thompson focused on the theme for the year of The Greatest Commandment. Mr Boateng's address was entitled 'Revival: The Methodist Dream' and emphasised the need to revive the Wesleyan fire.

You can read both addresses in full here:

www.methodist.org.uk/presidential-addresses-2022

Reception into Full Connexion

During Conference worship, 20 presbyters and three deacons were received into Full Connexion on Sunday 26 June, along with four presbyters by transfer and two presbyters by reinstatement and transfer. Later that day, ordination services took place in four churches in the vicinity of Telford.

Candidating Process

The Revd Dr Roger Walton, who had chaired the review group, presented the proposed new three-phase process to the Conference. The Conference adopted the new process, noting that it aims to be simpler and shorter, while allowing space for exploration and discernment. The necessary revisions to Standing Orders will be

brought to the 2023 Conference and the new process will begin in September 2023.

Pension Schemes

The Conference received an update on the pension schemes, and, in particular thanked those Methodist bodies which had contributed so generously to the Pension Reserve Fund following the appeal made at the 2021 Conference. It agreed to increase the circuit contribution rate for the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme to 29.5% from 1 September 2023, with the shortfall during 2022/2023 being paid from the Pension Reserve Fund.

Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI)

The Revd Dr Stephen Wigley, Chair of JACEI, presented the Committee's report to the Conference saying that due to world events, challenges remain acute and as pressing as ever for the investment community. This year's developments for the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church include a revised policy on Israel and Palestine, mining and other extraction industries, and increased engagement with banks including HSBC. A memorial urging further engagement with HSBC bank was accepted.

Methodist Homes (MHA)

The acting Chief Executive of MHA, Mr Dan Ryan, presented its report to the Conference, drawing attention to the considerable impact that Covid has had on residents, staff and families and the need to create connections with people in different ways. Mr Ryan thanked everyone for their support, care and compassion and said how this time is a significant moment for care, both in terms of staffing and funding. He said they will champion their sector and called on people to support their #FixCareForAll campaign, make links with local MHA services, consider becoming a rep and continue to pray for MHA and the work they do.

Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life

The Conference approved a new Rule of Life for the Methodist Diaconal Order, which had been reviewed and revised following the adoption in 2019 of the report, *The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order*. The new Rule is anchored more explicitly in the Scriptures and gives clear expression to the commitments contained in the ordination service liturgy. It has been developed collaboratively, working through the deacons' area and regional groups as well as the Convocation.

Marriage and relationships

The Conference received a Faith and Order Committee report on marriage and relationships. The Conference resolved that the 1992 Conference Statement on A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage should no longer have the status of a Conference Statement, bearing in mind the considerable changes in society and in the Church, the growth of understanding of human relationships and human sexuality, and the decisions that the Conference has made over the past thirty years. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to bring a report on singleness to the 2024 Conference and to report to the 2025 Conference on whether any further work on marriage and relationships is required.

Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers

The Revd Paul Wood, Director of the Ministries Team, presented the report on the Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers. The Conference adopted the Commitments and Expectations and directed that they be printed in the Guidance section of CPD, and resolved that these commitments should be affirmed annually, beginning in the MDO Convocation and the Conference in 2023.

Local Lay-Pastors

Following the decisions of the 2021 Conference to establish the office of Local Lay-Pastor, the Conference adopted a set of competencies for the role. The Conference also adopted a new section of Standing Orders which define the office, making provision for the appointment of people to it, their training, support and accountability as well as termination of the appointment.

Anniversaries

The Conference marked the 250th anniversary of the birth of Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, and the 150th anniversary of the foundation of Southlands College which opened in Battersea in 1872 as a training college for women teachers and is now part of Roehampton University. The Revd Paul Davis, the Interim Chair of Methodist Insurance, addressed the Conference to mark the 150th anniversary of Methodist Insurance. He talked about the formation of the company, set up to protect Methodist Churches from fire. He told representatives that they have consistently given profits away, to date giving away over £1.75m. They have worked with the All Churches Trust (as the Benefact Trust) and since 2016 have given £11m to 236 churches. £50,000 has been donated to All We

Can to be used to alleviate the trauma suffered by those affected by the war in Ukraine.

Action for Hope

The 2021 Conference, seeking to build on past work, and with a renewed sense of urgency, agreed an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030. The Council reported to the Conference that it had received a report which set out a plan of action for reaching that target. This plan is designed for the Church to work and measure progress on reducing carbon emissions, focusing on key areas of assets, wisdom and lifestyles. The Conference also received a number of memorials in this area, which will be taken into account as the work continues.

Forces Board

Alongside receiving the annual report of the Forces Board, the Conference welcomed the new Chaplain-General and Deputy Chaplain-General to the British Army, who are both Methodist ministers and the representatives of chaplains in the other armed forces. The Chaplain General, the Revd Michael D Parker, thanked representatives for the welcome and told representatives: "You as the Conference send us to do this work and to station us. Both we and the wider defence community thank you for your ongoing support. We ask that you will pray with us sometimes but pray for us all the time."

Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS)

The Conference received the report from the shadow JDS Committee, which updated the Conference on the progress so far with the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. The Conference adopted Standing Orders to establish the new JDS Committee, and also received a summary report from the JDS Scrutiny Group. During the Conference communion service, an Act of Repentance was shared. This liturgy will be offered to Districts and Circuits later in the year.

Oversight and Trusteeship

The Conference considered the Oversight and Trusteeship proposals. The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler opened the presentations, emphasising that not all the discussions have resulted in agreement and that while changing structures will not in itself make the Church more effective in mission, it should free it from what holds it back. The wide-ranging proposals were put before the Conference in order to reflect more accurately the size of the Church and to reduce the burden of administration on Districts, Circuits and churches. The Conference agreed to reduce the size and duration of

the Conference, with effect from 2024. It also agreed to establish a new trustee body, the Connexional Council, which will replace both the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee; it will be the charity trustee body and will have general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church. With around 20 members, the Connexional Council should be small enough to be nimble and flexible and large enough to have different views and balance. The amendments to the Deed of Union to enact this are the subject of a Special Resolution, upon which consultation will be sought with the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee before being brought back to the 2023 Conference.

The Conference declined to receive proposals which aimed to reduce the number of districts and subsequent resolutions were withdrawn. The Secretary of the Conference told representatives that a number of districts have already started work on boundary changes and these will be considered by the Methodist Council. Dr Hustler said that discussions with representatives will take place over the summer and it is hoped these will enable new and imaginative ideas to be explored as the Connexion discerns the way ahead.

The Conference received a report on the work undertaken so far in respect of all the connexional committees, and in particular it received proposals to establish a Nominations Committee for such committees to ensure that those appointed have the right skillset, as well as representing the diversity of the Church. Work is also continuing on the discernment processes for senior roles, and will report to the 2023 Conference. The Conference received a report from the Faith and Order Committee which offered some reflections on Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership, and directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to bring a report on the role of the District Chair to the 2023 Conference.

The Conference noted that, following the decisions of the 2021 Conference, work has continued to support the creative examples of local church governance such as multi site churches. There have been conversations about online church arrangements, and the Conference directed the Faith and Order and Law and Polity committees to consider the issues involved in establishing and operating an online church, and to report to the 2023 Conference.

Wales Synod Cymru

The Conference endorsed the establishment of a single new Synod for Wales, in place of the Wales Synod and

Synod Cymru. The new Wales Synod Cymru, which will be bilingual, will come into being on 1 September 2022.

3Generate

3Generate, the annual Children and Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church, had a successful first year at its new venue, the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. Following Covid, significant work was undertaken to build confidence in attendance, with 750 young people participating, supported by 250 leaders. The resolutions put before the Conference were based on Covenants made at 3Generate. The Conference agreed to encourage Circuits to explore a range of worship styles which include open discussions about faith and celebrating intergenerational learning, to urge circuit staff teams to review how young people under the age of 23 might be more intentionally and actively supported to consider their calling and be guided onto relevant pathways, and to encourage Church Councils to include the question 'how can we make our church a more praying church?' on their agendas.

Budget

The budget was presented to the Conference by the Connexional Treasurer the Revd Tim Swindell and the Director of Finance and Resources, Mr Matthew Tattersall. Mr Swindell told the Conference there were financial consequences of not supporting the district review proposals. Whilst the Connexional Team budget is making cuts of £1.4m over 5 years, these will not be sufficient and therefore the cut in District Assessment in 2023/24 needs to be postponed. The Conference adopted the budget and the district allocations of the assessment.

Notices of Motion

The Conference expressed its concern in the following areas:

- Healing ministry and neurodiverse conditions;
- Ukraine;
- Transportation of asylum seekers;
- Churches of sanctuary;
- Support for disposal of property;
- Fossil fuel.

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 22 memorials on topics including work with young people, ethical investments, connexional levy and property

improvements, IT provision for ministers, Council Tax rebate for energy costs, Living Wage, Israel Palestine, Korea, Tenant Farmers, climate change and energy efficiency, and safeguarding.

President and Vice-President designated for 2023-2024

The Conference designated the Revd Gill Newton to be President and Deacon Kerry Scarlett to be Vice-President of the Conference 2023/2024.

Appointments

The Conference made a number of appointments and reappointments, including:

The Revd Sonia Hicks as Chair of the Methodist Council from 1 September 2022.

The Revd Mark Rowland as Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee from 1 September 2022.

The Revd Andrew Charlesworth as Chair for Wales Synod Cymru from 1 September 2023; the Revd Philip Gough as Chair for the Lancashire District from 1 September 2022; the Revd Loraine Mellor as Chair for the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District from 1 September 2022; the Revd Dr Andrew Lunn as Chair for the Bolton and Rochdale District from 1 September 2022; the Revd Helen Cameron as Chair for the Nottingham and Derby District from 1 September 2022.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Birmingham from 22-29 June 2023

The **Methodist** Church 

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