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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2023 Methodist Conference

The 2023 Methodist Conference, held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole: Presbyteral Session 22-23 June; Representative Session 24-29 June. methodist.org.uk/conference

The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church and meets annually to discuss matters affecting the life of the Church, the nation and the world.

Induction of the President and Vice-President for 2023/2024

On Saturday 24 June, the Revd Gill Newton was elected and inducted as President of the Conference, and Deacon Kerry Scarlett as Vice-President. They shared their theme of 'Hidden Treasures' in their addresses to the Conference.

You can read both addresses in full here: methodist.org.uk/presidential-addresses-2023

Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination Services

New presbyters and deacons were ordained on Sunday 25 June 2023.

During the Sunday Worship, thirteen presbyters and four deacons were received into Full Connexion with the Conference, along with ten presbyters by transfer, and one presbyter by reinstatement and transfer when they were presented to the members of the Methodist Conference and to its President and Vice-President.

Having been received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning, presbyters and deacons travelled to nearby

Coventry with their families and friends for the afternoon where the diaconal ordinations took place at Coventry Central Hall and the presbyteral ordinations were held at Coventry Cathedral.

Oversight and Trusteeship

Following consultation with the District Synods, the Conference confirmed changes to the Deed of Union which it agreed in 2022, to establish a Connexional Council from 1 September 2024. The Connexional Council will be the trustee body for the Church, and will undertake many of the functions of the present Methodist Council and Strategy and Resources Committee.

Further to the decisions of the 2022 Conference in respect of reducing the size of the Conference from 2024, the Council brought a proposed allocation of seats in order to achieve that reduction. Among other changes, proposals were agreed to abolish the category of Conference-elected representatives and replace it with members of the Connexional Council.

The Conference agreed to the establishment of a new District incorporating the present Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool and Bolton and Rochdale Districts, with a continuing consultation taking place in the Manchester and Stockport District concerning this proposal. The new District will come into being on 1 September 2024 and will be called the North West England District.

There is Room – Triennial Membership Returns 2019-2022

Every three years a report is presented to the Conference on the membership returns of the Church. For the years 2020 and 2021 attendances were not recorded due to the lockdown with many societies meeting online for that time. The attendance figures for 2022 (as for 2019) do not include those who shared in online services.

The numbers indicate a 3,000 reduction between 2021 and 2022, more typical of pre-pandemic trends. The extrapolation implies a loss of 10,000 members during the pandemic, representing 15% of our membership, matching the narrative around the Connexion.

The decline in membership and attendance is not unexpected nor unique to Methodism. The faithfulness of God and God's people in the current reality is seen in pockets of growth in churches and circuits and in experimentation with Methodist people and churches taking missional risks.

Online Church

The Conference recognised the close relation of the questions of online celebrations of Holy Communion and predominantly online churches and, subject to the outcome of the connexional period of discernment in respect of online communion, affirmed in principle the possibility of predominantly online churches.

Action for Children

A report from the charity Action for Children, part of the Methodist family, thanked the Methodist people for their on-going support. Particular mention was made of their involvement in the online action to challenge the gap between the benefit uplift and inflation. In the year 2021/2022, Methodists raised £644,000 for Action for Children.

Budget

Planned reductions in the District Assessment mean there will be less funding for the Connexional Team and therefore a reduction in the work that the Team can undertake. Transitional funding was agreed to support the Connexional Team whilst a transformation plan is developed. The impact of inflation will continue to be passed through to the District Assessment.

Pension Schemes

This report updated the Conference on pension issues including the estimated funding position and a report from the task group established by the Council to look at the future of the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme. The improvement in the funding position has arisen due to the unprecedented and unexpected economic turmoil of the last year.

A justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah project

Walking with Micah has been a two-year project helping the Methodist Church to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking Church. It draws on Methodist history, theology, current concerns and practice, and recommends a framework of principles for justice which underpin our understanding of God's justice and what it means to seek justice. The report recognised how much is being done in churches to tackle injustice and recommends a two-year programme to embed these principles, priorities and practices in order to support and encourage this work. The Conference commended the report for prayerful study and action throughout the Connexion. You can read the 'report in three minutes' at methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/walking-with-micah/a-justice-seeking-methodist-church-the-report-in-three-minutes

3Generate 2022 – Methodist Children and Youth Assembly

This report highlighted the success of last year's 3Generate event that was bigger than ever before with 1200 children and young people, 456 group leaders, and 252 volunteers joining together. The Conference received the report, which called upon all Methodists actively to engage in conversation with children and young people about faith and life.

Reconciliation and Mediation Team and Positive Working Together

The Conference agreed to roll out a scheme to help resolve disputes in church communities across the Church following a successful pilot project. The Conference adopted the recommendation for the five-year programme, in partnership with *Place for Hope*, to offer an integrated approach in support of Positive Working Together and extending the Reconciliation and Mediation Team as a Connexion-wide programme.

A Methodist Way of Life

The Conference approved A Methodist Way of Life (methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life) and in workshops engaged with experiences and ideas of how this model of structured discipleship can help people to grow in faith and confidence.

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 23 memorials on topics including district probationers' committees and probationers' retreats, email provision for ministers, Israel Palestine, the Annual Affirmations, EDI training, annual returns and statistics, locally resident members, funding of a stipend during a minister's long term absence.

President and Vice-President designated for 2024/2025

The Conference designated the Revd Helen D Cameron to be President and Mrs Carolyn Godfrey to be Vice-President of the Conference 2024/2025.

Appointments

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

Dudley Coates as Chair of the Conference Business Committee for the Conferences of 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Anne Bolton as Connexional Treasurer for the connexional year 2023/2024.

Alethea Siow as Chair of the Resourcing Committee from 1 September 2023.

Jenny Jackson as Chair of the Stationing Committee from 1 September 2023.

The Revd Dr Marcus Torchon as Chair for the Bristol District from 1 September 2024; the Revd Angela Long as Chair for the Lincolnshire District from 1 September 2023; the Revd Andrew Fyall as Chair for the Nottingham and Derby District from 1 September 2023; the Revd Sonia Hicks as Chair for the Northampton District from 1 September 2024.

The Conference also appointed the Revd Dr Daniel Haylett and the Revd Loraine Mellor as Chairs of both the Plymouth and Exeter and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Districts for one year from 1 September 2023.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Leeds from 27 June-3 July 2024

The **Methodist** Church 

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