

16. Methodist Forces Board

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1. Methodist Forces Chaplains continue to minister to the women and men of His Majesty's forces throughout the UK and around the world. This is a significant and enduring ministry for which the Methodist Church is held in high regard due to the calibre of its chaplains. Further evidence of this good standing came in the King's New Year's Honours List when the Revd Ian Brown received an OBE for his work in chaplaincy, and the Revd Mike Hall received a Commanding Officers' commendation for his work with the RAF community.

Activity

2. The death of HM The Queen was keenly felt across the UK, around the Commonwealth and across the wider world. HM Forces were particularly affected by the Queen's passing, and were expected to undertake a significant part in the state funeral. A number of our senior chaplains were present at the state funeral in their respective roles, alongside the President of the Conference and the President of the Free Churches Group of Churches Together in England.
3. At the start of October 2022, the President of the Conference enjoyed a visit to the RAF. This visit gave the President a good insight into the workings of several RAF stations, and the opportunity to see chaplains in their own context. Each year this visit is timed to give the President a better understanding of the challenges and work of the Armed Forces prior to representing the Methodist Church at the National Act of Remembrance.
4. In time for Remembrance 2022, the Methodist Forces Board (MFB) published a revised set of resources to support church leaders with Remembrance Sunday services. A number of chaplains contributed to videos, sharing their perspectives on Remembrance; these have been extremely well received by churches.
5. In line with the God for All strategy, the MFB has supported local Methodists to engage in their own learning and discernment about how to engage with the Armed Forces community. As a way to support and encourage Districts/Circuits who may wish to pursue this, the Projects Officer organised visits for Methodists to Tidworth Garrison and Catterick Garrison. Colleagues had the opportunity to learn more for themselves about the way in which the Army operates and how chaplaincy supports Serving Personnel and the wider community. These visits demonstrate the willingness of the Methodist Church to engage in learning about new contexts.

16. Methodist Forces Board

They also enable informed intercession for those who lead a challenging lifestyle in order to protect us. The Projects Officer is working with chaplains to organise further visits around the Connexion, and would welcome an approach from any Circuit or District who wished to pursue these opportunities. The possibility of a New Places for New People-type of community within the Armed Forces is an exciting prospect that the MFB is keen to explore with a willing District(s).

6. To further encourage Districts and Circuits to become more engaged with the Armed Forces community, the MFB published a new missional toolkit in the autumn. This is available on the Forces Chaplaincy webpages of the Methodist Church website. This resource shares a wide range of proven approaches to engaging with Armed Forces personnel and their families.
7. During the Tri-Service Chaplains' Conference at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre in February 2023 we said a fond farewell to the Revd Alastair Bissell and the Revd Paul Mellor. Both have given long and distinguished service to the RAF. We were also able to welcome new chaplains the Revd Mark Street (Royal Navy) and the Revd Nimilote Rokotoro (Army). In March 2023 we welcomed back the Revd Phil Corrigan as a Reservist Chaplain to the RAF in Northern Ireland, where he is now a superintendent, having previously been a regular RAF Chaplain for many years.
8. The Armed Forces route to achieve Worship: Leading and Preaching (W:LP) status has had good engagement from the Fijian Methodist community in the UK, who see this as a helpful way to complete the course whilst serving in HM Forces. Three Fijian Methodists have engaged with this route, with one due to complete this year (used W:LP in a year) who is now seeking to candidate for ordained ministry and another now on trial with his circuit (using W:LP in a year), having completed his Army career. The Board is grateful to Cdr Mark Barton for continuing to oversee this work.
9. Through dialogue with the MFB, the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) has reaffirmed its commitment to work with the MFB to ensure that its resources are used in the most advantageous way to support the work of the Methodist Church within the military community. The AMMT also continues to support the Hants-Surrey Border Circuit with its work in Aldershot Garrison.

Challenges

10. Since January 2022 we have sadly been without the Secretary of the Forces Board (SFB) due to ill health. Proposed changes to the Board's way of working had been agreed by the Council in January 2022. However, due to the SFB's extended

absence significant new insights about the MFB's way of working arose. Therefore revised proposals were accepted by the Council in January 2023 which maintain much of the expertise and knowledge which has been built up over many years. This was deemed critical in supporting chaplains through the absence of the SFB. The Chair of the MFB wishes to thank those around the Connexion who have supported the chaplains and the MFB's work in the SFB's absence. Much of what we have been able to undertake in this last connexional year has been due to the stalwart efforts of our Projects Officer, and also the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Chair of the Southampton District, our senior chaplains and many others. The work of the MFB has continued to be delivered with high levels of productivity and effectiveness due to this support from across the Connexion.

11. Following feedback from the chaplains, the MFB approached and was delighted to receive a positive response from the Revd Graham Thompson, to act as a pastoral connection between the Methodist Church and the chaplains during the SFB's absence. This has been welcomed and is highly valued by the chaplains.
12. The work of the Board has led us to consider issues connected to the future profile of Methodism in Armed Forces chaplaincy. As the profile of those in ordained ministry changes, so do the issues with helping Methodist ministers to discern whether they are called to this ministry. The MFB has begun to engage constructively with the Stationing Advisory Committee to highlight areas where a different approach may support the Methodist Church to maintain its valued and valuable presence in Forces Chaplaincy, for instance by working to outline the opportunities within Armed Forces Chaplaincy to those colleagues who are without appointment and perhaps cannot see a future in circuit ministry, yet may be energised by the prospect of Forces Chaplaincy.

Cadet Force chaplaincy

13. Regular and constructive engagement with Cadet Force chaplains has supported the MFB to better understand the issues that they face as they volunteer their time to engage with the largest uniformed youth organisation in the UK. The profile of Cadet Force Chaplaincy has been helpfully raised with the presence of a Cadet Force chaplain on the MFB for the first time in recent years. Deacon Sue Culver has generously brought her experience of the Royal Air Force Air Cadets to the Board, and will be succeeded next connexional year by a chaplain from either the Sea Cadets or Army Cadet Force.
14. Whilst chaplains' engagement with the adult volunteers, Cadets (aged 11-18) and the Cadets' families is hugely rewarding, they have asked the MFB for support in

16. Methodist Forces Board

raising the significance of this ministry with colleagues in Districts and Circuits who they sometimes feel do not perceive this work to be a critical part of circuit ministry.

Note of thanks

15. As ever, the work of the MFB is capably assisted and financially supported by the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust. The Board's thanks go to the Trust for their enduring support to maintain a strong Methodist presence in the military which ministers to Serving Personnel and their families, civil servants and contractors, to the glory of God.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 16/1. The Conference receives the Report.**