

28. Stationing Committee

Contact name and details	Pamela Lavender, Chair of the Stationing Committee chairstationing@methodistchurch.org.uk
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Stationing Committee wishes to express its grateful thanks to all those many people who, in ever-changing and sometimes challenging circumstances, have given many hours of work to the important task of helping to match our ministers to Circuits in need of their gifts and graces.
- 1.2. The Stationing Committee is grateful to the Revd Jenny Impey, who has guided the Stationing Matching Group, to the Revd Dr Stephen Lindridge, who chairs the work of the Stationing Action Group, to Deacon Karen McBride and the Revd Dr David Hinchliffe, who guide the work of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee, and to the Revd Dr Claire Potter, Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries, for all the prayerful work they undertake throughout the year.
- 1.3. The circuit appointments submitted for Stationing Matching were, once again, scrutinised carefully in order to understand the needs of the Connexion. Those appointments agreed to be of very great need are prioritised in the Stationing Matching meetings and every effort is made to match such places with a minister. This scrutiny is now indicating that there is a growing number of places across the Connexion where ordained ministry is very thinly spread, which is a matter of increasing concern.
- 1.4. The Stationing Committee is aware that much reconfiguration of Circuits and development of teams of lay workers, deacons and presbyters is being undertaken in order to facilitate effective mission and ministry, and is very grateful for these initiatives.
- 1.5. The Stationing Committee is very grateful to the presbyters and deacons who offer to develop their gifts and skills to be used in Circuits to enable them to develop their mission and ministry. It is also appreciative of those ministers willing to serve in the places that need them most.
- 1.6. The Stationing Committee has continued to work with Bevan Powell, the Connexional Adviser for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, to continue to challenge any discriminatory behaviour of which it is aware and to embed the recommendations of the JDS strategy within its work.

28. Stationing Committee

2. Stationing Matching Group

- 2.1. Stationing matching is a process by which we attempt to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Circuits and presbyters. The work of the Stationing Matching Group was, as always, conducted carefully and prayerfully with time being taken to consider each presbyter and Circuit as the group sought to make matches which would enable presbyters and Circuits to flourish in mission and ministry, and to ensure that ministry was spread across the Connexion in response to the greatest need.
- 2.2. By the beginning of the matching process, 108 circuit profiles and 72 presbyteral profiles had been submitted. As the process continued, a further two circuit profiles and five presbyteral profiles were submitted. Twenty of the appointments were designated as Critical after scrutiny, compared to 44 last year. This meant the group was able to focus more carefully on the Circuits in greatest need of ministry and ensure a better spread of matches across the Connexion. Inevitably, it was not possible to make matches for every appointment and throughout the process discernment continued with permission being given for profiles to be reshaped in order that matches might be made with deacons, probationer presbyters and those who have been recommended for transfer from other churches and conferences.
- 2.3. During the first meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG1), at the beginning of November, there were 107 Circuits seeking presbyters and 68 presbyters available for matching. Sixty-seven matches were made, including matches for 19 out of the 20 critical appointments. Fifty-nine out of 67 visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Of the eight that were declined, six were declined by the presbyter and two by the Circuit. Overall, 88% of the visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted.
- 2.4. The second meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG2) met in early December. An additional circuit profile had been designated as critical. There were 48 circuit profiles to be considered, of which four were critical and only 11 presbyters available for matching. Nine matches were made, including matches for three of the critical appointments. Eight out of nine visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Overall, 89% of the visits resulted in accepted invitations.
- 2.5. The third meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG3) was held online in January. At that stage there were 41 Circuits seeking presbyters, among them two appointments designated as critical, and only six presbyters were available.

28. Stationing Committee

Matches were found for five of the presbyters and four of the visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted (80%).

- 2.6. Since SMG3, the Stationing Action Group (SAG) has met monthly to seek to match the remaining presbyters together with others who become available during the connexional year. At the time of writing, seven Circuits (including four superintendencies) are seeking presbyters and there is one presbyter available who is seeking a part-time appointment.
- 2.7. The Stationing Matching Group is grateful for the engagement of presbyters and Circuits in exploring the matches, all those who prepared profiles, drew up lists to indicate the kinds of presbyters and Circuits they could see themselves working with and flourishing in, prepared for visits and travelled out of their comfort zones to engage prayerfully in discernment conversations. The final recommendations to the Conference come not from the SMG but from the presbyters and Circuits who say yes to one another and begin the journey of discovering gifts and opportunities for mission and who will commit themselves to welcome services to “join together in the work to which God has called us.” (*Methodist Worship Book* page 361).
- 2.8. The SMG invited Bevan Powell, the Connexional Equalities and Diversity Adviser, to observe each phase of SMG and the Stationing Committee is considering his recommendations as we continue to build on our commitment to justice, dignity and solidarity.

3. Report of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee (ISSC)

- 3.1. The ISSC1 met on 4-5 January 2023.
- 3.2. **Probationer Appointments:** Twenty-four presbyteral probationer profiles had been approved by the Initial Stationing Scrutiny group. The scrutiny group worked with several Circuits to help them to restructure and rethink profiles so that they were suitable for probationer presbyters. One of these 24 profiles was submitted for a probationer presbyter or a Minister of another Conference or Church (MOCC).
- 3.3. **Probationers:** Twenty presbyteral probationers were matched with appointments. One probationer returning to probation after several years of ill health was not matched at ISSC1 because a part-time appointment was needed and none had been submitted. However, a match was subsequently made through the Stationing Action Group.

28. Stationing Committee

- 3.4. ISSC1 noted that four diaconal probationers were being considered by the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee between 6-8 January 2023. All four were subsequently matched with appointments.
- 3.5. The ISSC2 met on 8 February 2023.
- 3.6. **Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs):** Five Ministers of other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs) were matched with appointments. Three of these are recommended to become 'Recognised and Regarded' ministers. Two are recommended to be received into Full Connexion.

The MOCC processes have been paused for this year. Two of those who have been stationed were already in appointments as 'Authorised to Serve'. It was agreed that because they were already here, they would be permitted to apply to transfer: one as Recognised and Regarded and the other to Full Connexion. They attended the full transfer panel process and were recommended in November 2022. The remaining three ministers were in stationing in 2022, when there were not sufficient appointments and, therefore, their profiles had been held over for a year.

The Stationing Committee confirmed that MOCC appointments should be capped at 10-12 each year (but it should be noted that those chosen to be in appointments that are outside the control of the church or not in circuits, are not counted within the cap).

4. Report of the Stationing Action Group

- 4.1. The Stationing Action Group commenced its work on 6 February 2023 and will continue through to the Conference. At the beginning of the process, there were 37 available appointments (of which one had been identified as 'critical'). Seven presbyters (not all of whom have been available to be matched for a variety of reasons) had still to agree an appointment.
- 4.2. Since then, 14 presbyters and four new appointments have been considered by SAG. One presbyter has withdrawn to take up another appointment outside the control of the church.
- 4.3. In February, four matches were made which led to invitations to serve being accepted by four presbyters, one of which was for the critical appointment. In March, five matches were made which led to invitations to serve being accepted by four presbyters. Five matches were made in April.

- 4.4. Twenty appointments were withdrawn at the end of March, following submission of reasoned statements
- 4.5. The actions reported mean that, at the time of writing, there remain seven available appointments, four of which are superintendentcies. There is also still one presbyter who is looking for a less than half time appointment.

5. **Report on Diaconal Stationing**

- 5.1. Diaconal stationing matching began with 12 ordained deacons and four people to be stationed as diaconal probationers and 19 circuit profiles. As the matching process began, one other ordained deacon entered the stationing process.
- 5.2. Two of the ordained deacons' partners were also in the stationing matching process as presbyters and in each case the diaconal appointment was identified as the priority.
- 5.3. All appointments were carefully scrutinised. Visits continue to be an essential part of the diaconal direct stationing process and for the first time in recent years all appointments were able to have an 'in-person' visit with the Warden/Deputy Warden, often following an initial zoom conversation.
- 5.4. In November, the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee (DSSC) met with the ordained deacons and those to be stationed as probationers and their households, for stationing conversations. Following these conversations one ordained deacon was identified for matching early at SMG2.
- 5.5. In January, the DSSC matched the remaining 12 ordained deacons and four diaconal probationers to 16 of the remaining 18 Circuit profiles. The matches were called at SMG3.
- 5.6. At the end of January, all but one of these matches were confirmed. Unfortunately, due to personal pastoral circumstances, one ordained deacon needed to withdraw from the matching process and from the Circuit with which they had been matched.
- 5.7. During the following months, the DSSC continued to work in collaboration with the Stationing Action Group, with the three unmatched Circuits and with members of the Order. At the time of writing, one Circuit has withdrawn its profile, one Circuit has received a match and one Circuit is not matched.

28. Stationing Committee

5.8. The DSSC recognises and appreciates that its work has been enabled by the willingness of Circuits to discern diaconal appointments and, in one case, to enable a deacon to be matched with a new appointment earlier than expected. In addition, the DSSC is thankful for the faithfulness of deacons in living out of the diaconal principles of itinerancy and direct stationing and their generosity in embracing the invitations and opportunities these bring, to join in with the work of God in the world.

6. Stationing Code of Practice

6.1. Amendments have been made to the Stationing Code of Practice which reflect changes in Standing Orders, the removal of gender based personal pronouns and other matters which the Stationing Committee wish to emphasise in the light of experience from year to year. This year, due to requests for greater clarity from the Circuits, a particular focus on guidance for Letters of Understanding has been included.

7. Projections

7.1 Number of Methodist presbyters and probationers in the active work

Connexional Year	Actual 2019/2020	Actual 2020/2021	Actual 2021/2022	Estimate 2022/2023	Estimate 2023/2024
Start of Year	1340	1308	1228	1167	1125
Normal Retirements	49	80	74	60	60
Early Retirements	4	4	7	5	5
Resignations	6	13	7	6	5
Other Losses	0	1	2	1	1
TOTAL LOSSES	59	98	90	72	71
New Probationers	17	13	23	21	16
Other Gains	10	5	6	9	5
TOTAL GAINS	27	18	29	30	21
END OF YEAR	1308	1228	1167	1125	1075

7.2 Number of Methodist Deacons and Probationers in the Active Work

Connexional Year	Actual 2019/2020	Actual 2020/2021	Actual 2021/2022	Estimate 2022/2023	Estimate 2023/2024
Start of Year	134	135	134	139	134
Retirements	3	5	3	10	5
Resignations	0	1	0	0	0
Other Losses	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL LOSSES	3	6	3	10	5
New Probationers	4	5	7	4	3
Other Gains	0	0	1	1	0
TOTAL GAINS	4	5	8	5	3
END OF YEAR	135	134	139	134	132

8. Moving Forward

- 8.1.** The Stationing Committee remains committed to a thorough review of all our stationing processes this year in order to ensure that we develop robust and coherent policies designed to ensure well supported mission and ministry across the Connexion. It is vitally important to ensure the continuing well-being of our deacons and presbyters in addition to providing ministers to those places where they are most needed.
- 8.2.** The context in which the Stationing Committee does its work is ever more challenging but the developments that the Committee has overseen this year and the ongoing stationing review which is planning for the future cause it to remain hopeful that we will sustain appropriate ways to station our ministers in the service of Our Calling.

9. Stationing Review Group

It was reported to the 2022 Conference that the Council had agreed that a thorough review of stationing processes be undertaken due to a number of concerns raised by the Ministries Committee, Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Chairs' Meeting, Connexional Leaders' Forum and gatherings of

28. Stationing Committee

superintendent ministers in Districts and connexionally. The Council agreed the terms of reference for this work, and reported those to the 2022 Conference.

The Stationing Review Group (SRG) has set out to undertake a root and branch review of processes related to the stationing of ministers in the Methodist Church in Britain and to report to the Conference with recommendations for changes to those processes and the necessary changes to Standing Orders. The SRG met for the first time in January 2023.

The review will consist of input from a wide range of individuals and groups including consultation with the Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Circuit Stewards, Chairs of District, the Warden of the Diaconal Order, Lay Stationing Representatives, ministers with recent experience of being stationed, representatives of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee, the Ministries Committee and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; as well as the Methodist Church in Ireland and ecumenical partners.

In May this year, the SRG distributed a survey to Circuit Stewards, District Chairs and Lay Stationing Representatives, presbyters and deacons (in various roles both inside and outside the control of the Church) and their spouses/partners. The data from that survey is currently being analysed and will inform the recommendations of the SRG.

The Stationing Review Group will present its final report to the Conference of 2024.

***RESOLUTION

28/1. The Conference receives the Report.