

## 42. Committee on Methodist Law and Polity (2)

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### SECTION D ONLINE MEETINGS

1. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic led to an enormous expansion in the use of platforms such as Zoom for the conduct of meetings considered necessary or desirable for church purposes. This was recognised by the Conference of 2020, which passed a resolution (LP/5) to ratify such action as far as possible and a further resolution (LP/12) to enable the holding of online meetings in the future while coronavirus restrictions on physical meetings remained in place. This was subject to special provisions in relation to matters of discontinuance, competence, safeguarding and discipline.
2. Similar resolutions to enable the conduct of business online, but not limited to the duration of coronavirus restrictions, were passed by the Conference of 2021 (Resolution LP/18) and the Conference of 2022 (Resolution 43/2). These resolutions were intended to have temporary effect, pending the adoption by the Conference, if thought fit, of Standing Orders relating to the holding of online meetings. Resolution 43/2 was accordingly expressed to apply to the business of the Methodist Church conducted in any jurisdiction forming part of the Methodist Church in Great Britain until the close of the Conference of 2023.
3. The Committee has now given consideration to the form of permanent legislation relating to online meetings and brings the draft Standing Orders set out below to the Conference.
4. In doing so, it has borne in mind that in the law of England and Wales there is no generally applicable legal definition of the word “meeting”. In the context of general meetings under the Companies Acts, however, it has been said that the rationale for the requirement of such a meeting is “that members shall be able to attend in person so as to debate and vote on matters affecting the company” (*Byng v. London Life Association Limited*). Nevertheless it was held in that case that advantage could be taken of technological advances so that members were not required to be present in the same room; it was sufficient if there was an audio-visual link which enabled all the members to see and hear what was going on in other rooms and to be seen and be heard. During the pandemic, and

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in connection with meetings to approve a company scheme of arrangement, it was held that a visual link was not required and a meeting could be held using telephonic communication if it provided “the mechanism by which creditors or shareholders are able to come together and consult with each other, should they choose to do so, in order to make a collective decision on the rearrangement or compromise of their rights against the company” (*Castle Trust Direct Plc*). The important point was that those attending should be able “to hear and ask questions and express opinions in circumstances in which everybody else who is present at the meeting is also able to hear, ask questions and express opinions”.

5. The Committee also notes that the delegated legislation introduced in England and Wales to enable local authorities to continue to hold meetings during the pandemic permitted meetings to be held by conference call as well as by arrangements involving a video link (the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, S.I. 2020 No. 392 and the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020, S.I. 2020 No. 442.
6. Consultation is being undertaken in the home Districts and Circuits outside England and Wales to ascertain whether there is any difference of principle as to what may constitute a “meeting” in those jurisdictions.
7. No amendments are being proposed to the text of the Deed of Union or the Model Trusts.
8. In the view of the Committee, the purpose of the various meetings which are provided for by the Standing Orders or are held in the ordinary conduct of the business of the Methodist Church is similarly to enable those entitled or invited to attend to come together, whether physically or remotely, using a mechanism which enables them all to have a proper opportunity to engage in discussion and debate and to reach conclusions on a basis informed by such discussion and debate. In many circumstances this purpose may best be achieved by a traditional physical meeting now that the obstacles posed by the coronavirus restrictions have been removed. The Committee is, however, conscious that there may be many reasons why in practice a more representative meeting and in consequence better discussion and debate and better informed decisions may be achieved through meetings held in another form.
9. The principles adopted by the Committee are that:
  - 9.1 The legislation should be as enabling as is reasonably possible, except that special provision should continue to be made for discontinuance,

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competence, safeguarding and discipline cases conducted under the relevant Standing Orders (which are separate from procedures under employment contracts);

- 9.2 Some additional requirements should apply in the cases of Circuit Meetings and Church Councils;
- 9.3 Guidance should be made available in Book VII as to the factors to be borne in mind in relation to different types of meeting when a decision is made as to the form in which a meeting should be held.

10. The Committee draws attention to the following points:

- 10.1 The Committee's view, as reported to the Conference of 2020 in the Second Report of the Business Committee, is that as the governing documentation of the Methodist Church in Britain currently stands, it requires a physical meeting of the Conference;
- 10.2 The Deed of Union and the Model Trusts may only be amended by special resolution (or by deferred special resolution in the case of the doctrinal standards) as defined in the Methodist Church Act 1976. The definition of "special resolution" in s.2 of that Act requires a "special majority" of the members of the Conference, such a majority being defined as "three quarters of the members ... present and voting". It follows that amendments to the Deed of Union and the Model Trusts may only be made at a physical meeting of the Conference;
- 10.3 The Methodist Church Funds Act 1960 contains provisions relating to meetings of the Central Finance Board. Such meetings are not governed by Standing Orders and whether or not a physical meeting is required is a matter of the construction of the Act itself.

### **Standing Order amendments**

The Committee recommends the following Standing Order amendments to the Conference.

**008 General Provisions.** In these Standing Orders, unless the context otherwise requires:

... ***(ivA) references to a 'meeting' have the meaning given in Standing Order 019B;***

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- 019B Form of meetings. (1) Subject to clauses (6) and (8) below, a 'meeting' for the purposes of these Standing Orders is any coming together of a group of persons which is a physical meeting, an electronic meeting or a hybrid meeting as defined in clauses (2) to (4) below and related terms shall be construed accordingly.**
- (2) A 'physical meeting' is a meeting at which those attending come together at a specified geographical location and meet face to face.**
- (3) An 'electronic meeting' is a meeting at which those attending come together by means of any equipment or other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to speak to and be heard by each other (whether or not the equipment or facility also enables those persons to see each other).**
- (4) A 'hybrid meeting' is a meeting at which those attending come together by a combination of physical presence in accordance with clause (2) above (whether in a single location or more than one) and other means specified in clause (3) above.**
- (5) A person is 'present' at a meeting for voting purposes if that person is present physically in the case of a physical meeting, electronically in the case of an electronic meeting or either physically or electronically in the case of a hybrid meeting at the time when the vote is taken.**
- (6) A meeting may not take the form of an electronic meeting or a hybrid meeting if such a meeting would be contrary to any provision of the Deed of Union or the Model Trusts or, where the meeting is not to be held in England and Wales, the law applying to the holding of meetings in the relevant jurisdiction.**
- (7) Clause (8) applies to a meeting of the following bodies:**
- (i) an initial or appeal committee under Section 03;**
  - (ii) a consultative or pastoral committee under Section 04;**
  - (iii) a safeguarding panel or safeguarding appeal panel under Section 23; and**
  - (iv) a discipline or appeal committee under Part 11.**
- (8) Where this clause applies, a meeting may only be held as an electronic meeting or a hybrid meeting if:**
- (i) the person who is the subject of the relevant discontinuance, competence or safeguarding proceedings or the respondent under Part 11 agrees that the meeting may take place in such a form; or**
  - (ii) the chair of the relevant committee or panel is satisfied that in all the circumstances such a meeting would be able to deal fairly with the proceedings and decides that the meeting should be held in that form.**

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### 502. Chairing, *Form and Notice of Meetings.*

...

- (4) (a) Any body to which this Standing Order applies may fix the ***date***, time, ***form*** and ***(subject to paragraph (b) below) and place (where appropriate)*** of its next meeting and if it does so no further consultation or consent ***under the provisions of this Standing Order*** is required for the calling of that meeting as so fixed.
- (b) ***In the case of the Circuit Meeting or a Church Council, the relevant body must take into account when fixing the form of the next meeting the need to ensure that as many members and persons invited to attend as possible are able to attend and to participate effectively. If necessary, a decision as to the form of the next meeting must be deferred to enable the requirements of clauses (5) and (6) to be satisfied.***
- (c) ***The chair of the Circuit Meeting or a Church Council may in case of emergency change the form of a meeting if the chair reasonably believes that the attendance at a meeting in the original form will not be sufficient to enable good decision-making, but must adjourn the meeting if the attendance at the meeting in its new form is not reasonably representative of those entitled to attend.***
- (5) Subject to clause (4) above official meetings shall be convened and held only after consultation (in the case of circuit meetings or committees) with the Superintendent or (in the case of local meetings or committees) with the presbyter who is in pastoral charge of the Local Church, with any presbyteral probationer or any person authorised to serve the Church as a presbyter under Standing Order 733 who is (in either case) exercising pastoral responsibility in it, and with any local lay-pastor appointed under the provisions of Section 56A of Standing Orders to serve in it, and (as to both circuit and local bodies) with the appropriate chair where one has been appointed under clause (2) above.
- (6) Subject to clause (4) above such a meeting shall be called only by, or with the consent of, its chair or the Superintendent or (in the case of local meetings or committees) the presbyter who is in pastoral charge of the Local Church in consultation with any local lay-pastor appointed under the provisions of Section 56A of Standing Orders to serve in that church or, if a chair has been appointed under clause (2) above, that chair, except that if they all refuse to call or consent to the calling of a meeting required by the Deed of Union or Standing Orders, or requested in writing by not less than one third of the persons entitled to attend as members of that meeting, then that meeting may be called by its secretary or convener, or by any three other members.

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- (7) In all cases care shall be taken to ensure that notice of meetings to which this Standing Order applies, **including notice of the place of the meeting or its form if not physical**, reaches all persons entitled to be present **sufficiently in advance of the meeting to make it reasonably practicable for them to attend if they wish to do so** and that decisions ...

...

**613. Meetings.** (1) The Church Council shall meet at least twice in each year **on the date, at the time and in the format determined in accordance with Standing Order 502 and upon the notice required by Standing Order 502(7).**

### **Guidance for CPD**

The Committee also offers the following guidance to the Conference and recommends that it be published in Book VII of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.

### **Part 6A Guidance relating to the form in which meetings should be held**

#### **Church Council meetings**

1. A Church Council has authority and oversight over the whole area of the ministry of the church, including the management of its property, and is responsible for its aims and methods, the determination and pursuit of policy and the deployment of available resources (S.O. 603). So far as possible, the Council should be constituted so as to ensure that all areas of the church's life are adequately represented and in particular that, wherever possible, young people are included (S.O. 610). It is therefore important that meetings should be held in a form which enables the maximum attendance and the most effective participation.
2. Experience since the use of Zoom and similar platforms became commonplace, including experience of remote court hearings, suggests that people find it easier to concentrate on and to understand what is being said if they are face to face, can see more of the person who is speaking and can take into account body language. Some people do not give the same weight and the same quality of attention to electronic meetings. If all other considerations are equal, a physical meeting may be more effective.

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3. This is, however, likely to vary very considerably from place to place, bearing in mind the size of the local church, the age of its members, how close they live to the church, the time of day at which meetings may be held, the time of year and many other circumstances. Matters for particular consideration are:
  - 3.1 does the current practice for holding meetings exclude the same people repeatedly?
  - 3.2 do some members have difficulties in attending physical meetings?
  - 3.3 do some members lack access to Zoom (or an equivalent) at all, or are some members for any reason inhibited or uncomfortable in using it?
  - 3.4 do some members have significant problems with bandwidth or connectivity, so that even if they are able to attend they are not able to participate effectively?
  - 3.5 if a hybrid meeting is under consideration, would that disadvantage the members attending remotely?
4. It is important to bear in mind that the form of meeting which may be most convenient for the majority may be exclusionary as respects the minority.
5. Environmental concerns (the avoidance of travel) and possibly the cost of heating a building are relevant but should not outweigh the need to ensure full participation.

### **Circuit Meetings**

6. The Circuit Meeting is the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of the circuit and has to determine the assessment payable by each local church (S.O. 515). The considerations set out in paragraphs 1 to 5 are likely to apply equally to a Circuit Meeting, or possibly more so in the case of environmental factors. In addition:
  - 6.1 a Circuit Meeting may potentially be very large. It is harder to manage larger meetings effectively if they are in electronic or hybrid form.
  - 6.2 care will need to be taken in deciding on the form of meeting to ensure that the representatives from all the churches can participate effectively.

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### Synods

7. In addition to dealing with matters of business, many Districts use the opportunity of coming together at Synod as a means of fellowship within the District and for purposes going beyond the conduct of business. That object is unlikely to be achieved if the Synod always meets online. The District should consider whether that is significant within the life of the District.
8. There are clearly significant environmental implications of a physical meeting in the case of many Districts which will need to be weighed against other concerns.

### Procedure, rules of debate and voting

9. Probably relatively few Circuit Meetings, and certainly few Church Councils, will often have occasion to consider the formal rules of debate (see S.O. 517(2) and S.O. 615(2)), but the rules are framed in the expectation of a physical meeting and may not so readily apply to an electronic meeting or hybrid meeting. If either such form of meeting is adopted, it will be necessary to ensure that all participants, including the chair, are familiar with techniques for catching the chair's eye and that those techniques work satisfactorily. The rules of debate also provide for procedural motions, some of which may lead to a vote. It is important to ensure that there is a clear and well understood process for taking votes, even when no vote is expected, or at least that a clear explanation can be given at the time.
10. Where elections are to be held, consideration should again be given to voting processes if the meeting is not a physical meeting.
11. If a meeting is in electronic form, and perhaps also if it is in hybrid form, it may be desirable to agree rules about the use of the 'chat' facility (both as a means of general communication and as between individuals) and the 'reactions' facility.
12. If confidential business will be discussed, consideration should be given to how effectively confidentiality can be maintained if the meeting is not a physical meeting, having regard in particular to the possibility that when a person attends a meeting electronically others, without the agreement of the members of the meeting, may be present in or need to pass through the same room or otherwise may be able to hear what is said.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 42/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**



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- 42/2. The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out above.**
- 42/3. The Conference adopts the guidance set out above and directs that it should be published in Book VII of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.**

### **SECTION E**

#### **AMENDMENTS TO MODEL TRUST 26 (PROTECTION OF PURCHASERS)**

Model Trust 26 is designed to protect a purchaser for value of a legal interest in Model Trust property – usually a sale or lease, or more rarely the grant of an easement or a mortgage – and permits a Memorandum of Consent to be signed by the connexional Property Secretary (or other person so authorised by the Methodist Council) for every transaction, thereby providing assurance to purchasers of Model Trust property that the managing trustees have the power to enter into the transaction.

However, Model Trust 26 was introduced before legislation governing disposals of charity land came into force in most, if not all, of the jurisdictions in which the Model Trusts apply. For example, purchasers of charity land in England and Wales are now protected by the Charities Act statements which managing trustees are required to certify in the transfer deed, lease, etc. and there is no need for the additional assurance of a Memorandum of Consent.

In practice, the requirement for TMCP to prepare, and the Council's authorised delegate to sign, a Memorandum of Consent for every sale, lease, etc of Model Trust property is burdensome and time-consuming, amounting to the production of several hundred documents each year.

In 2010, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Memorandum of Consent requirements in Model Trust 26 be deleted. However, for reasons unknown, the proposal was never put to the Conference.

The Committee therefore brings the proposal to the Conference now, and asks the Conference to delete the definition of "memorandum of consent" in sub-paragraph (1) and to delete sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) of Model Trust 26.

Amendments to the Model Trusts of this nature require a special resolution, which means a resolution passed by a special majority (three quarters of the members of the Conference present and voting) in year one and then, after appropriate consultation, confirmed by the following year's Conference (again by a special majority).

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This is the first year in which these Model Trust amendments have been brought to the Conference and the Committee advises the Conference that consultation on those amendments should be with the Methodist Council under Standing Order 126(1)(c). The amendments will also be submitted to the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Scotland, and Shetland Synods.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**42/4. The Conference receives the Report.**

**42/5. (three quarters majority) The Conference, by special resolution, amends Model Trust 26 by deleting the definition of “memorandum of consent” in sub-paragraph (1) and deleting sub-paragraphs (3) and (4), and directs that consultation on the proposed amendments be with the Methodist Council under Standing Order 126(1)(c).**

### SECTION F

#### RENEWING FULL CONNEXION – COMMITMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The 2022 Conference adopted the Commitments and Expectations under the Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers (Conference Resolution 19/2 (2022)). The Committee was directed to consider and draft the necessary changes to Standing Orders to give effect to the Conference’s desire that there is an annual commitment to the Commitments and Expectations made at the Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation and in each of the two sessions of Conference: Presbyteral and Representative (Conference Resolutions 19/3 and 19/5).

The Conference Resolutions adopted make no mention of the Conference Diaconal Committee. However, the preamble to Section 2 of the Commitments and Expectations states that the commitment is to be made in both sessions of Conference (Presbyteral and Representative) as well as the Conference Diaconal Committee. The Committee observes that there is thus a contradiction between the Commitments and Expectations and the Resolutions adopted by Conference which specify the Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation as the location of the making of the annual commitment.

The Committee considers that to require by Standing Order that the Commitments and Expectations be made and remade each year in three separate locations by three groups of people who represent different groups within the Church may give rise to an inference that the Commitments and Expectations go beyond simply a drawing together of that which was already held within the Church’s understanding of ministry and the relationship

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of lay and ordained within the life of the Church. The Committee recommends, therefore, that the making of the annual commitment takes place solely in the Representative Session of Conference, as it is the Session of Conference in which the ordained (both presbyteral and diaconal) and lay members of the Church come together, and where each may make commitments to each on behalf of the whole Church. The Committee proposes a new Standing Order 13A to provide for the making of this commitment.

The Committee further considers that introducing 'expectations' which are stated (in the headnote to Section 3 of the Commitments and Expectations) to "...set out the standards and provide tools for discernment with regard to how ministers fulfil their office...", necessarily provides a basis upon which complaints may be made against any minister, which in turn engages the complaints process set out in Part 11 of Standing Orders. Pending the outcome of the current review of the Church's Complaints and Discipline processes, the Committee suggests that this be dealt with simply by the addition to SO 1101(1)(i) and to SO 1130(3) of editorial notes referring to the Commitments and Expectations printed in Book IV Part 6.

The Conference is asked to amend Standing Orders by introducing a new Section 13A and Standing Order 13A1 as follows:

### **Section 13A – Covenant Commitment**

#### **13A1 Making the Commitments and affirming the Expectations**

***Annually, during the Representative Session of the Conference, those members present shall, on behalf of themselves and of the whole of the membership, make the Commitments and affirm the Expectations contained in Part 6 of Book IV: 'Renewing Full Connexion: Commitments and Expectations'.***

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**42/6, The Conference receives the Report.**

**42/7. The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out above.**

### **SECTION G AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS**

In addition to the amendments submitted in Part 1 of the Committee's report to the Conference, the Committee also recommends the following amendment.

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### **Standing Order 760 (Resignation)**

Standing Order 761(6) entitles a minister who wishes to be reinstated to be accompanied by a friend to the meeting of the advisory committee. However, no such entitlement is afforded to ministers wishing to resign under Standing Order 760(1). The Committee understands that it is usual practice to allow ministers to be accompanied by a friend to a resignation meeting and recommends that Standing Order 760 be amended to reflect this practice. In recommending this amendment, the Committee also suggests taking the opportunity to incorporate gender-neutral language in the rest of the Standing Order (in keeping with the Conference's policy).

The Conference is therefore asked to amend Standing Order 760 as follows:

**760 Resignation.** (1) Any presbyter or deacon wishing to resign from Full Connexion shall send to the President notice of such resignation. All such notices shall be referred by the President to an advisory committee for consideration. An opportunity shall be given to the minister to be present at the committee if ~~he or she~~ **the minister** should so desire. The committee shall advise the President as to whether the resignation should be accepted and, if so, the date from which it should take effect and to what extent the status of the person concerned as a local preacher and member should be affected. The committee shall also advise the President, the Superintendent of the Circuit in which that person is stationed or if not stationed is shown as residing and the Chair of the District of which the Circuit forms part whether any public announcement should be made and if so, to whom and in what terms.

**(1A) *The minister may be accompanied by a friend when attending the advisory committee.***

(2) The advisory committee shall consist of an ex-President or ex-Vice-President appointed by the President, the Secretary of the Conference, who shall act as convener, the Chair and Superintendent concerned, in the case of a deacon the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order or ~~his or her~~ **the Warden's** deputy, and three other persons appointed by the convener.

(3) Where a person seeking to resign or withdraw under this Standing Order is at the time of giving notice the subject of a complaint or charge under Part 11:

- (i) that person or the President may at any time before a decision is made under this Standing Order require that the complaint or charge is first disposed of in accordance with the provisions of that Part;
- (ii) if no person so requires, the provisions of Standing Order 1151(9) shall apply.

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- (4) Should a minister intimate to the President an intention to resign from Full Connexion at some future date the President may regard that intimation as tantamount to a present resignation and the procedure shall be as above.
- (5) In any case in which a minister gives notice of ~~his or her~~ a wish to resign or intention to resign at some future date (whether or not the resignation is accepted) the President, acting in consultation with the advisory committee, may, if ~~he or she~~ **the President** thinks fit, notify the convener of the Complaints Support Group appointed by the District in which the minister is stationed or if not stationed is shown as residing. The convener shall offer two members of the Group to the minister to act as advisers and friends and two further members of the Group to any Local Church or churches in the Circuit (if any) in which **or of which** the minister is stationed or has pastoral charge, or in which ~~he or she~~ **the minister** undertakes pastoral responsibilities. The convener shall also offer further members of the Group to individuals or groups of individuals to whom the President directs that such an offer should be made.
- (6) The President, acting in consultation with the advisory committee, has authority to accept the resignation of a presbyter or deacon in Full Connexion and in every case of an accepted resignation the President shall make a declaration with regard to the status of the person concerned as a local preacher and member. Every action under this clause on the part of the President shall be deemed for all purposes to be the action of the Conference. The President shall report ~~his or her~~ **the action taken** to the Presbyteral Session of the Conference next following or the next meeting of the Conference Diaconal Committee, as the case may be, and to the Representative Session.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**42/8. The Conference receives the Report.**

**42/9. The Conference amends Standing Order 760 as set out above.**

### SECTION H RESOLUTIONS ON THE PASTORAL WORK

The Conference of 2022 (Resolution 19/4) directed the Law and Polity Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring a proposal relating to the inclusion and positioning of Book V Part 5 (Resolutions on the Pastoral Work) to the Conference of 2023.

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Both Committees have considered the matter. Whilst there appears to be no legal or theological objection to moving Book V Part 5 from its current position in Volume 2 to Volume 1 of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD), the Faith and Order Committee has expressed the view that the Resolutions in Part 5 can, and should, simply be deleted. The Law and Polity Committee sees no legal reason why Part 5 should not be deleted, and therefore recommends to the Conference that this be done.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**42/10. The Conference receives the Report.**

**42/11. The Conference directs that Part 5 (Resolutions on the Pastoral Work) of Book V (Historic Texts) be removed from CPD.**

### SECTION I THE COMMITTEE'S ONGOING WORK

The Committee wishes to highlight to the Conference the following items on the Committee's workplan:

#### 1. Review of CPD

Triggered by the conversation on the placing of Part 5 of Book V referred to above, discussions have taken place this year about conducting a general review of the content of Volume 1 of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, which is no longer available in printed copy. In the wider context, the Secretary of the Conference has now asked the Committee to consider a fuller review of all aspects of CPD, for which it is proposed to establish a working party to scope the work required and devise a realistic timetable in which to conduct the review, having regard to other projects which are currently in progress, notably the Oversight and Trusteeship work and the review of the Church's complaints and discipline processes in Part 11 of Standing Orders. Any review of CPD will necessarily include consideration of the accessibility of CPD to all who need to refer to it, and also the status of the guidance which is published within it.

#### 2. Connexional guidance and codes of practice

The Committee has noted that at times those responsible for a particular area of the Church's life or activity issue guidance which says that a particular action "shall"

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happen, whereas Standing Orders (which, until any amendment is agreed, should take precedence) might only say “may” happen.

The Committee wishes to draw the Conference’s attention to the risk of such guidance being seen as authoritative instead of the applicable Standing Order(s). The Committee is pleased to have had the opportunity to assist the Connexional Team in reviewing various handbooks and guidance during this year, to enable those producing such publications to be confident that they do not conflict with the Church’s governing documents.

The Committee recommends that all guidance and Codes of Practice should refer expressly to the relevant Standing Orders from which that guidance or Code is derived, including where appropriate citing the full text of the Standing Order(s) to aid understanding and application.

All queries on the interpretation of Standing Orders should be sent to the Committee’s Secretary, the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice:  
[lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk)

### **3. Changes in composition of Districts**

The Committee has noted some possible areas of confusion between Standing Order 401, which deals with the changes in compositions of Districts, and Section 48A, which concerns Districts with modified constitutions, but which also strays into the territory of changes in the compositions of Districts. The Committee proposes to consider this, potentially to clarify the provisions and to consult with relevant others (such as the Secretary of the Conference and the Methodist Council), to check whether there are other process or policy considerations arising from the present provisions that deserve attention, in order to enable any proposed amendments to be brought to the Conference of 2024.

### **4. Standing Order 1104 Record-keeping, confidentiality and related matters**

The Committee has identified a need to align Standing Order 1104 with the Church’s data retention schedules, particularly in the light of the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) as to the holding of records relating to safeguarding matters.

The Committee also recognises that there are several significant policy questions to be addressed regarding retention of records generally – both locally and connexionally. The Committee therefore proposes to undertake a wider piece of the work, in consultation

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with other relevant parties, to review the whole of Standing Order 1104 and the Church's general policy relating to document retention. This work will also include a review, from this perspective, of the Guidelines for Good Practice in Confidentiality and Pastoral Care in Part 14 of Book VII of CPD.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**42/12. The Conference receives the Report.**

### **SECTION J**

#### **CANDIDATING FOR MINISTRY - STANDING ORDER AMENDMENTS**

The Conference of 2022 (Resolution 17/16) directed the Committee to present to the Conference of 2023 draft revisions of Section 71 of Standing Orders (and of any related Standing Orders) to accommodate the new candidating process.

At the time of writing this report, there are still several policy questions relating to some aspects of the new arrangements to be resolved before the Committee is able to complete the drafting of the Standing Order amendments for presentation to the Conference. The Committee therefore proposes bringing the Standing Order amendments to the Conference elsewhere in the Agenda.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**42/13. The Conference receives the Report.**