

CHANGING PATTERNS IN MINISTRY

CONFERENCE REPORT



The **Methodist** Church 

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's
love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission

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Contact names and details	The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler Secretary of the Conference SoC@methodistchurch.org.uk The Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee Price-TebbuttN@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	The resolutions are listed within and at the end of the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	This report explores and brings recommendations relating to key aspects of the Methodist Church's changing patterns of ministry.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction ● The context of ministry in the Methodist Church ● The ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry ● Local Lay-Pastors ● Itinerancy and stationing ● Serving in specific contexts
Background documents	<i>Ministry in the Methodist Church</i> , 2018 (particularly part C) https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2018-32-Ministry-in-the-Methodist-Church.pdf
Consultations	This is joint work of the Faith and Order, Stationing and Ministries Committees.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Methodist Church in Britain¹ is facing a number of challenges and opportunities which impact on the way in which ministry is exercised in Local Churches, Circuits and Districts.² A draft statement offering a theological framework for the Methodist Church's understanding of ministry was sent out

1 Referred to afterwards as 'The Methodist Church'.

2 See *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B section 3 and Part C 2.1 and 2.2.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

for consultation in 2018.³ This theological statement spoke of a need to remember, rearticulate and reimagine aspects of the Methodist Church's understanding and practice of ministry. Much of the reimagining is ongoing work for the whole Connexion as Methodists continue to respond to their changing situations and reflect on how they undertake ministry in the contexts in which they live, work and worship. The 2018 Conference noted several aspects of the changing patterns of the Methodist Church's ministry that required further reflection, and directed the Secretary of the Conference to oversee joint work by the Faith and Order, Ministries and Stationing Committees to explore these areas and report to the 2020 Conference.

- 1.2. Although the Changing Patterns of Ministry report was printed in the 2020 Conference Agenda, the majority of it was not discussed by the Conference because the online form of its meeting meant that only essential business was taken. Therefore, there has been the opportunity for the report to be further developed, and it is presented to the 2021 Conference in a revised form. During the COVID-19 pandemic patterns of ministry in Local Churches have changed and continue to develop. This report focuses on the specific matters directed by the 2018 Conference, but Local Churches, Circuits and Districts are encouraged to engage with the theological framework set out in the *Ministry in the Methodist Church* report as they continue to reflect on the shape of ministry in their particular contexts. Resources will be available to assist with this.
- 1.3. Around the Connexion there are different experiences of the aspects of ministry discussed in this report, and there are different views on the way in which the Methodist Church responds. Given this, there was not always clear consensus within the three committees regarding the proposals, particularly those relating to Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4). This report, therefore, outlines a direction of travel whilst highlighting some of the concerns and questions it raises, to enable the Conference to consider the different perspectives and make decisions about this aspect of the Church's ministry.
- 1.4. This report focuses on the areas that the 2018 Conference directed be explored. It offers some further comment on the current context (section 2) and local lay leadership and pastoral ministry (section 3), before addressing various questions around local lay-pastors (section 4), itinerancy and stationing (section 5), and presbyters serving in specific contexts (section 6).
- 1.5. The background to this work is in section C of the *Ministry in the Methodist Church* report (2018), and this further thinking builds on the theological principles

3 *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B.

established in the draft statement.⁴ The proposals in this report are thus rooted in the theological framework described in the revised statement that will be presented to the 2021 Conference for adoption as a Conference Statement.

2. The context of ministry in the Methodist Church

2.1. As noted in the *Ministry in the Methodist Church* draft statement, the Methodist Church's current context is one of variety, fluidity and uncertainty. Some patterns of church life have changed and others are changing, and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight how rapidly this may happen. It is not possible to document, let alone explore, all the significant changes in British society within living memory of many Methodists, but the draft statement offers some illustrations.⁵ This further exploration of changing patterns of ministry found that several contexts particularly shape current challenges and the Methodist Church's response to them. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to address them further, they are important to note:

2.2. Feeling overwhelmed

2.2.1. The experience of feeling overwhelmed by having too much to do was something frequently noted within conversations about ministerial workloads. Indeed, many people in many areas of life describe such an experience. Although experienced more widely within society and church life, particular factors relating to ministers include: the relentless work-flow; the isolated nature of the role (particularly for presbyters); the lack of adequate support (including where there are not appropriate people to take on tasks) and supervision (although it is too early to judge the effect of establishing supervision for all ministers); and the variety of tasks and expectations. Feeling overwhelmed not only continues to be a pressing issue, but it is one of increasing severity, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.2. The feeling of being overwhelmed has a significant effect on wellbeing, motivation and engagement with different aspects of ministry. It impacts on both individuals and communities. Ordained ministry involves holding in tension, or balancing, a way of life which places an emphasis between being and doing; it is a vocation not a series of tasks to be done. The Ministries Committee is currently undertaking a piece of work on ministerial wellbeing, but it is important to note that the issues involved are systemic and institutional as well as personal.

4 *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B.

5 Part B section 3 *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018).

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

2.3. Stretched resources

2.3.1. The Methodist Church faces the challenge of being a large institution in terms of buildings but with decreasing numbers of people able to take on all of the responsibilities associated with that.⁶ The impact of (generally) ageing congregations and decreasing numbers in many Local Churches has therefore been noted, alongside the increased time and expertise needed to meet increased and more complex responsibilities regarding safeguarding, property, finance and other administrative and governance tasks associated with running an institution which maintains a large number of properties. In addition, the administrative requirements upon organisations continue to increase, for example in the areas of accounting and GDPR, demanding further time, energy and expertise.

2.3.2. Consultations at the 2015 Conference indicated that often presbyters picked up a disproportionate amount of administrative tasks and responsibilities where there were not enough members of the church with the time, energy, expertise or inclination to take responsibility for them. As the Methodist Church has more to do with fewer resources than, in many places, presbyters (who have a particular role in the oversight and trusteeship structures of the church) can end up having to pick up those institutional commitments or requirements which would otherwise be left undone as there is no one else with the time or necessary expertise to take them on. Examples were given of significant responsibilities not being fulfilled. There was general agreement that fulfilling such tasks on an ongoing basis is not part of the role of presbyters, but because of their oversight and trustee responsibilities they often end up filling the gaps, especially when there is a general desire to give more time, energy and attention to 'mission rather than institutional maintenance'. In 2008, the report of the *Stationing Review Group* similarly observed:

“Our consultations have reinforced the strong perception (among both ministers and laity) that the burden of administration placed on both presbyters and deacons is too heavy. This is not all bad: the area of safeguarding, for example, illustrates how administrative procedures bring to light wrongdoing in situations that were formerly taken on trust. Not all presbyters are bad administrators and not all lay people are good ones: nor should administration be assumed as the main lay contribution to a ministry team. But this is an area where team working is perceived to have the potential to produce more effective ministry.”⁷

6 See, for example, *Statistics for Mission* (2017).

7 *Stationing Review Group*, (2008), 4

- 2.3.3. During 2020-2021 the limited extent and uneven distribution of available resources, including finance, has been highlighted, further prompting reflection on priorities in all parts of the Connexion. Maintaining its resources and ensuring that it is as safe a place as possible for people, is part of the Methodist Church's mission, but questions persist about what resources the Methodist Church continues to need (including buildings) and difficult decisions need to be made about what should continue to be resourced, and what needs to be laid down.
- 2.3.4. Related to this are also expectations about what the Connexional Team is and is not responsible for, or what it might or might not undertake in order to support and resource Local Churches. It is not clear whether the role and capacity of the Connexional Team is always understood (both around the Connexion and within the Team itself), and there are tensions around the relationship of the work that the Conference directs to the priorities and concerns in Local Churches and Circuits.
- 2.4. Ecumenical contexts
- 2.4.1. In some places, churches are together undertaking mission and ministry in creative ways. Ecumenical working is varied, and often dependent on the nature of individual attitudes and relationships (particularly of the ordained). Sometimes there is a tension between commitment to local ecumenism, particularly where there are good relationships amongst churches in a particular community, and commitment to the Methodist Circuit.
- 2.4.2. Working ecumenically in the context of differing theologies, politics and ecclesiologies raises a number of challenges; and especially where similar words are used for different ministries, masking some key differences. There is sometimes a desire, at the local level and ecumenically, to be able to equate ministries from different traditions, but questions persist about whether this is either desirable or achievable.
- 2.4.3. When Christians work and worship together, the theology, practice and polity of the churches involved are sometimes challenged, reviewed, and reimagined; and sometimes discarded. Particular questions that often arise for the Methodist Church are how we embody and practise connexionalism and shared oversight, how we confer and discern together, and how accountability and oversight are appropriately exercised particularly in relation to safeguarding, pastoral care, finance and property.
- 2.5. The Ministry of the Whole People of God
- 2.5.1. In receiving and sending out for consultation the 2018 draft statement on *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, the Methodist Conference reaffirmed that any reflection

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

on ministry is rooted in an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God:

“Belonging to the Church involves supporting and encouraging each other, engaging in corporate discernment and making oneself accountable to other members of the community of faith. Although all members of the Body of Christ are given particular gifts and engage in specific tasks, ministry is always corporate and belongs to the whole Church. Ministry is therefore primarily about the witness of the whole people of God in the world. It is never merely an individual endeavour but always exercised as part of the Body of Christ.”⁸

2.5.2. The experiences and contexts noted above raise questions that indicate some anxiety and loss of confidence in the ministry of the whole people of God. These questions are about:

- a. understandings of shared oversight, particularly the exercise of collective responsibility and collaborative working in Local Churches and Circuits;
- b. who does what, how people are resourced and supported, and how individual roles and responsibilities work and fit together;
- c. how local conversations and decisions about mission and ministry relate to conversations in other parts of the Connexion;
- d. why there is a tendency for some roles in the Church to be regarded as ‘ministry’ for which people have a ‘vocation’ and some not;
- e. why there continues to be a lack of recognition that many participate in mission and ministry through work, volunteering and building relationships outside the Church;
- f. how an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God is embodied in the diverse and dispersed Methodist Connexion, and thus how discernment is exercised when there is a tension between individual needs, gifts, resources and vision (be they personal, of the Local Church, or of a particular community) and the needs, vision and priorities of the Methodist Church as a whole.

2.5.3. This report seeks to play a part in restoring and reaffirming the ministry of the whole people of God through enabling the Church to reimagine aspects of its ministry, but it is hoped that there will continue to be shared reflection on these questions in all parts of the Connexion. The draft statement reminds us that:

8 *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part B, 4.1.

“All of God’s people have gifts to be used for the sake of the whole Church for the sake of the world. As the Methodist Church continues to discern how it is to live out its calling in a changed and changing world, all members are called to re-discover, with the help of the community, their gifts and the tasks which they are to undertake. Circuits and Local Churches are the settings in which we consider ways of supporting each other in this endeavour and together responding to God’s call.”⁹

3. The ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry

- 3.1. As the Faith and Order, Ministries and Stationing Committees have explored the particular aspects of ministry identified by the 2018 Conference there are several areas of common concern, or where there are frequent questions, that warrant exploration or work. It is not possible to address fully all of these within this report but this section offers some further comment on collaborative leadership and team working, pastoral charge, employed lay ministry, endings, class meetings and the importance of pastoral care. The Conference specifically requested further work on the role of church stewards and the results of this work are detailed below.
- 3.2. Church Stewards
 - 3.2.1. Church stewards have a key role in the leadership and oversight of the Local Church. Together with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility, they are responsible for giving “leadership and help over the whole range of the church’s life and activity” and holding together “in unity the variety of concerns that are contained within the one ministry of the Church.”¹⁰
 - 3.2.2. The precise nature of the church stewards’ duties and responsibilities and the way in which they work with the other officers of the church and the circuit ministers, varies. Sometimes the church stewards are the key leadership in the Local Church, sometimes they work with others or there is a separate church leadership team, and sometimes their duties are primarily connected with making practical arrangements to enable worship to take place. The different ways in which the office of church steward is conceived, the Church’s changing patterns of ministry, and the different ways in which Circuits and churches are responding to some of the current challenges have led to requests for further reflection on

⁹ *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part B, 2.6.

¹⁰ Standing Order 633.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

the role of church stewards and the 2018 Conference requested a review of the Standing Orders pertaining to church stewards.

- 3.2.3. The Methodist Council therefore directed that this work review the particular duties of church stewards in the Standing Orders. Members of the Faith and Order and Ministries Committees in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee have therefore considered the role and main responsibilities of church stewards. In addition, the Ministries Committee has overseen the production of a new handbook for church stewards which offers guidance and is a resource for anyone undertaking the role.
- 3.2.4. This work was undertaken before the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of physically gathering in buildings for worship. Many acts of worship now take place online and church stewards are encouraged to give attention to how they fulfil the duties describe in Standing Orders 633 and 634 in this context. No further changes to these Standing Orders are recommended at this time, but as further reflection on online life continues they may need to be revisited in due course.
- 3.2.5. As a result, the general responsibilities of church stewards as set out in Standing Order 633 are reaffirmed, underlining that the church stewards are corporately responsible with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity:

633 Church Stewards – General Responsibilities. The church stewards are corporately responsible with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility in relation to the Local Church for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity. They are particularly charged to hold together in unity the variety of concerns that are contained within the one ministry of the Church. To this end it is their responsibility to uphold and act upon the decisions and policies of the Church Council. In the discharge of their responsibilities they are encouraged wherever possible to draw other members with appropriate gifts and skills into a leadership team to be appointed by the Church Council.

- 3.2.6. Many of the particular duties listed in Standing Order 634 are often undertaken by other members of a Local Church. That they are listed in Standing Orders indicates that they are significant responsibilities that are important to the good order of the Church. It is therefore recommended that SO 634 is amended as set out below in order to make it clear that the responsibility of the church stewards is to ensure that these things happen, but that they do not necessarily have to undertake them themselves.

634 Church Stewards – Particular Duties. (1) The church stewards shall be responsible for seeing that all services, meetings and other engagements appointed on the circuit plan in connection with the Local Church are duly held, **ensuring that** ~~for welcoming and being in attendance upon the preacher~~ **is welcomed** before and after the service and **attended afterwards, that** whenever necessary, arranging hospitality **is arranged** for him or her and **that** the payment of his or her expenses **are paid** and, in the unforeseen emergency of a failure on the part of a preacher or other responsible person to keep the appointment, for seeing that a service or meeting suitable to the occasion is actually held.

(2) It shall be the duty of the church stewards **to oversee the preparation and delivery of necessary public announcements and to ensure that** before each service for public worship on Sunday to prepare for announcement by the preacher or some other person written notices of all services, meetings and other engagements appointed on the circuit plan or officially communicated and to see that no announcement is made save such as is in accord with the general usage of the Methodist Church.

(3) The church stewards shall **ensure that** give due notice of all public collections **is given**, arrange for the taking of the collections **is arranged**, enter the amounts **collected are entered** in a book **or other form of record** kept for the purpose and without delay ~~that they are~~ remitted them to the treasurer or other persons authorised to receive them **without delay**.

(4) The church stewards shall **see ensure** that all necessary arrangements are made for the administration of the sacrament of baptism after due notice has been given to the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility in relation to the Local Church, in the case of children by the parents or guardians, in other cases by the candidate for baptism.

***RESOLUTION

26/2. The Conference amends Standing Order 634 as set out in paragraph 3.2.6 of the report.

Collaborative leadership and team working

3.2.7. An important aspect of the Methodist understanding of oversight is that it is corporate in the first instance (residing in the Conference) and then secondarily

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

focused in specific individuals and groups (lay and ordained).¹¹ Methodist presbyters have a particular part to play in exercising the oversight of the Conference, and the Conference also shares its oversight with the rest of the Connexion through delegating particular responsibilities to other groups (for example, Church Councils, church pastoral committees, Circuit Meetings, Circuit Leadership Teams, District Synods, District Policy Committees, the Methodist Council) and to particular office holders (for example, class leaders, pastoral visitors, church and circuit stewards, local preachers, district officers, members of the Connexional Team). Standing Orders emphasise repeatedly that oversight is not complete if the two strands “of groups and officers on the one hand, and of presbyters exercising pastoral responsibility and pastoral charge on the other” do not collaborate and interact.¹² Each requires the other.

- 3.2.8. One of the distinctive features of Methodism, therefore, is its adoption of collective forms of leadership, with individual forms of leadership finding their place and purpose within the representative decision-making groups.¹³ Leadership of this kind gives to all members a responsibility in achieving the Church’s aims, liberates them to take initiatives in pursuing these aims, and facilitates the putting to good use of the enormous variety of gifts among all God’s people in the service of the Church.¹⁴
- 3.2.9. The Methodist Church’s emphasis on the ministry of the whole people of God and its understanding and practice of shared oversight leads it to affirm collaborative team working, where the differences of those ordained or authorised to a connexional office (presbyters, deacons and local preachers) and those appointed to other roles and offices in the life of the Church can be a source of strength “if their nature is understood so that proper use is made of each.”¹⁵ Team leadership and collaborative ways of working have been continually encouraged. For example, the *Stationing Review Group* report (2008) said: “As Circuits are increasingly working in a mixed economy of ministries – ordained presbyters and deacons in roles within and outside the Church, full-time or part-time, lay people employed as well as in formal voluntary posts and faithful members holding office – there is an urgent need to develop collaborative partnership ways of working of a professional standard.”¹⁶

11 *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 2.22.

12 *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 2.27.

13 *The Ministry of the People of God*, 1988, 051(b).

14 *The Ministry of the People of God*, 1988, 053(d)

15 *Stationing Review Group*, 2008, 2.

16 *Stationing Review Group*, 2008, 4.

3.2.10. Such practice can more fully represent the diverse insights and concerns of the Christian community, can draw out and better use the gifts of church members and ministers, and can facilitate a sharing of responsibility, pastoral support, and theological insights. Collaborative teamwork is therefore encouraged in all aspects of the Methodist Church's life, and it is the context in which the recommendations of this report are situated.

3.3. Pastoral charge

3.3.1. For many years presbyters have been deployed within Circuits by being identified with one or more Local Church(es). Some Circuits, however, now deploy presbyters differently, for example according to particular gifts or with responsibility for a particular area (such as one of the four areas of *Our Calling*). Concerns about the effects of having fewer presbyters and the different ways in which some presbyters are now deployed within Circuits have prompted questions and highlighted misunderstandings about the concept of pastoral charge.

3.3.2. In Standing Orders, pastoral charge is defined thus:

"Pastoral charge in a Circuit is exercised by those presbyters in the active work who are appointed by the Conference to that Circuit; sharing with others, in the courts of the church and individually, the exercise of the particular responsibilities and ministries involved, they have oversight on behalf of the Conference of the worship, pastoral care and mission policy of the Circuit and its constituent Local Churches in accordance with Methodist discipline."¹⁷

3.3.3. Pastoral charge in a Circuit is therefore something that is always shared by the presbyters in the active work, and how those presbyters together exercise pastoral charge may vary. It is clear that there is a common misunderstanding that pastoral charge refers to the relationship between a particular presbyter and a Local Church or several Local Churches. It will therefore be helpful for there to be some further reflection on the concept of pastoral charge.

3.4. Employed lay ministry

3.4.1. Throughout the Connexion there are many people employed to undertake a particular role as part of the ministry of the Methodist Church. The variety and amount of lay employment has increased in the last couple of decades. For example, the General Secretary's Report (2011) noted the context of increased numbers of lay employees undertaking an unprecedented variety of ministries in

17 Standing Order 700(7)

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

our Church, and today people are employed to undertake a wide diversity of roles in Methodist churches, Circuits, Districts and within the Connexional Team. It is not just the number of lay roles that has increased, but the complexity and variety of those roles. There have also been further changes in employment law.

- 3.4.2. One of the ways in which the Methodist Church therefore exercises its ministry is through being an employer. In its capacity as an employer, it witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not least through seeking to ensure that good employment practice is embodied throughout the Connexion. Many churches, Circuits and Districts need support and guidance when considering employing somebody to undertake a role within the Church. Even with the practice set out in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and the resources provided by Districts and the Connexional Team, it is still necessary sometimes to seek further expert advice. Given the range of issues that can arise and the range of demands that being an employer brings, it is timely for there to be further consideration of what it means to be an employer in the context of witnessing to the gospel, of how good practice can better be embodied in the life of the Church, and of the resources and expertise needed to ensure that all parts of the Connexion are adequately equipped.
- 3.4.3. Employment is a specific relationship with terms and conditions being set out in a contract. For all employed roles the job description should be clear, with boundaries and expectations being explicit. An employee is in a particular and defined relationship with the Church. Districts play a specific role in the oversight of all lay employment, including through appointing a Lay Employment Sub-committee, which shall “comprise or have ready access to persons of sufficient breadth of knowledge and current experience of employment law and personnel management”. The Lay Employment Sub-committee should scrutinise, make recommendations and give approval for all new proposals for lay employment within the District, its Circuits and Local Churches.¹⁸ All lay employment appointments require the approval of the relevant District Policy Committee.¹⁹ The Connexional Team also has a responsibility to provide guidance on personnel management law and practice.²⁰
- 3.4.4. Some roles are undertaken by both volunteers and employees, and this is particularly the case for Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4). An employee and a volunteer have different relationships with the Church and it is important to recognise the capacity in which someone is serving. There can be tensions where paid employees and volunteers are doing similar work in the same context, and

18 Standing Order 438A.

19 Standing Order 570(2)(c).

20 Standing Order 438(3)

churches, Circuits and Districts are encouraged to reflect further on these when considering any new appointment.

- 3.4.5. Those who line manage or supervise lay employees should be careful not to allow boundary slippage, ie people should be clear what they undertake because they are paid to do so and distinguish this from anything they may do voluntarily because they are a member of the Methodist Church. It is noted that, as a matter of good practice, the expectations and boundaries of all voluntary roles should also be explicit.
- 3.4.6. It is important to recognise that many Methodists undertake employment within and outside of the Methodist Church out of a deep sense of vocation, which may stretch over several different employed positions during the course of their working life. For many employed positions within the Methodist Church, however, there is no requirement that the person be a Methodist or a Christian. Therefore, for some roles and for some employees vocation will be a significant factor, while for others it will not. This prompts further reflection on which roles it is essential for the role holder to be a Christian and for which roles it is essential that they are a member of the Methodist Church.

3.5. Endings

- 3.5.1. The work on Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4 below) involved some discussion about the endings of appointments and, of course, many aspects of such endings are common to the wide variety of roles in the life of the Church, including employed roles, those undertaken voluntarily, and presbyteral and diaconal appointments. Endings bring with them a sense of loss. Often there is also cause for celebration of what has been achieved and appreciation of the gifts and graces which the particular person has brought to the role. Sometimes endings can be difficult, particularly if there are different views on the timing of the ending and the way in which it has come about.
- 3.5.2. Members of the Methodist Church are encouraged to reflect on endings in different areas of the Church's life, and to think about how the ending of a role or piece of work might be handled from the outset, including questions of ongoing pastoral support for the person concerned. There may be particular tensions if someone is likely to remain within the particular community, and also if an extension to an appointment or role is sought but not granted. It is helpful for there to be a period of time (of at least three months and usually a year for ministers) during which the individual has no active engagement in the pastoral ministry of the relevant Local Church(es). This provides an opportunity for everyone to adjust to the new reality.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

3.5.3. How an ending is experienced, by an individual and wider community, can be significantly affected by the attention that is given to the different aspects of endings right at the beginning. As a matter of good practice it is therefore suggested that there is consideration of the following at the start of any appointment as well as towards the end:

a. Ensuring clarity about the length of the appointment and terms of service.

This will include looking at whether there will be a probationary period and whether there is the possibility of the appointment being extended and, if so, how and when these will be reviewed;

b. Ensuring a good start also includes looking at what kind of induction is needed and offering an opportunity to welcome, maybe within worship (and *The Methodist Worship Book* contains some services of admission, commissioning and welcome²¹);

c. A process for an annual appraisal as well as regular supervision. In some appointments, such as Local Lay-Pastors, there should also be regular line management. These are good practice in themselves and also play a part in there being shared understanding of the how the terms of the role are being fulfilled. They provide opportunities to affirm positive aspects of performance in the role, to identify if there is a need for any further support, training or reflection, and to raise any concerns and look at how these might be addressed. They also offer a means of reflecting on the expectations around a role (both of the individual and others);

d. Offering an exit interview. An exit interview offers an employee (or volunteer appointed to a particular role) the opportunity to reflect on their experience of the role and raise any concerns or things which might not have been easy to say whilst in the appointment. It is helpful to give attention as to how this will be handled, who will be responsible for having the conversation, where and how the contents of the conversation may be shared, and whether the person leaving will be accompanied;

e. Offering a 'transitional conversation'. A transitional conversation would be more focussed on the vocation of the individual (whether lay or ordained) and provide an opportunity to explore what the next stage of their ministry might look like and how they are going to transition from one stage of ministry to another. If a person will still be a part of the community then it is also

21 See Section 8 of *The Methodist Worship Book*, pp.329-366

an opportunity to reflect on boundaries and the change in relationships, to consider whether there is a period of 'rest' from any responsibilities, and to address issues of power and authority. A transitional conversation may also be a place where issues of loss and bereavement are discussed;

- f. How the ending will be appropriately acknowledged.** The way in which an ending will be acknowledged is likely to depend on a variety of factors including what the experience has been like for the individual and church community. It may be appropriate to acknowledge the ending in a liturgical act as well as in more informal ways. In some cases an individual may not wish for an ending to be marked and yet the whole community will be facing an ending and it may be appropriate for there to be some acknowledgement of this. Alternatives could include making a note in the minutes of the relevant meeting;
- g. Whether there should be any ongoing pastoral support and whether there are pastoral matters requiring further attention.** This may include attention to issues of power and authority, to changes in relationships and ways of doing things, to interpersonal and role related boundaries, to addressing particular issues and concerns, and to how loss, change and bereavement are handled.

3.5.4. Questions of power and authority often arise when someone ceases a role but is still part of the community. This can happen in various situations including for supernumeraries and for Local Lay-Pastors and lay employees who are members of the Church. The need for succession planning in many areas of the Church's life is also of concern.

3.5.5. There are many different ways in which the ending of an appointment might be marked, but it is noted that whilst the Methodist Conference has authorised some liturgies for the admission, commissioning and welcome to a variety of roles, it has not offered any liturgical guidance for the ending of appointments. It is therefore recommended that the Faith and Order Committee further explores this. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministries Committee produce a resource which includes some guidance for conversations around the ending of appointments.

***RESOLUTIONS

26/3. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to produce liturgical guidance for marking the ending of appointments in a service of worship.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

26/4. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to produce a resource which includes guidance for good endings.

3.6. Class meetings

- 3.6.1. As part of the work on ministry in the Methodist Church the importance of supporting each other in ministry has been reaffirmed and the ongoing need to hold each other to account for our ministry has been acknowledged. This is best and usually done in the Local Church.
- 3.6.2. For early Methodists the class meeting was the place where this happened (and this still happens in some places, including in Methodist Churches in other parts of the world). The Wesleyan Methodist Conference's *Resolutions on Pastoral Work* (commonly referred to as the 'Liverpool Minutes 1820') noted that meeting with Class Leaders had been found "essential to the pastoral care and spiritual prosperity of our Societies".²² In early Methodism the class meeting had four overlapping functions. Firstly, it was a place of fellowship: members accompanied one another on a common journey. Secondly, it was a place of conversion and discipleship. It was expected that members demonstrated, in their living, that a new life had begun. Thirdly, the class meeting was a place of financial accountability and, finally, the class meetings were a place of discipline. That included both an account of a member's own actions and the possibility of being reproved by others in the meeting.²³ For many Methodists today there may be little familiarity with the concept of class as hitherto understood. In most contexts, however, the functions of the class meeting now tend to happen in different ways and in different places, but there is a renewed interest in the class meeting and in how it might be reconstituted within different contexts.
- 3.6.3. The reconsideration of the role of church stewards, the increasing number of church leadership teams, the different ways in which pastoral care is exercised, and the creation of an office of Local Lay-Pastor all raise questions about the role and place of the class leader. Currently, under Standing Order 630(1), Church Councils should annually appoint "class leaders and pastoral visitors to share in the pastoral care of all those whose names are on the community roll of the Local Church." It is the duty of a Class Leader (as set out in Standing Order 631(1) to exercise pastoral care over those in their charge; to meet the Class regularly; to visit those on their pastoral list regularly; to encourage members to fulfil their

22 The Methodist Church, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 1, 1988* (Seventh edition), *The Liverpool Minutes part V, paragraph 2*, p.82.

23 Goodhead, A, 2010, *A Crown and a Cross: The rise, development, and decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth Century England*. Wipf and Stock: Eugene, Oregon.

commitment as set out on the ticket of membership, and where appropriate to encourage others to consider the claims of membership; to inform the minister of any special need or change of address; and to pray regularly for those on their pastoral list. A pastoral visitor is expected to undertake similar duties except that of meeting with a Class (SO 631(2)). In practice, the functions of the class leader are often undertaken by those in other roles in Local Churches, and there are some common misperceptions such as equating the role with that of pastoral visitors or house group leaders.

- 3.6.4. Current reflections on changing patterns of ministry also link with ongoing questions about sustaining the current number of local Methodist churches in their current form and the way in which the Methodist Church shares in God's mission. Methodist ecclesiology allows for different patterns of church life and there is an opportunity to explore patterns whereby a presbyter works with Local Lay-Pastors in leading and caring for different societies in different places. This links with wider conversations about structures of trusteeship and the restructuring taking place in some Circuits where there is one church with several classes worshipping in different places.
- 3.6.5. What seems to be emerging is that the Methodist Church is in a constant state of flux and local leaders (ordained and lay) are having to improvise quickly 'on the ground' to enable new things to develop that are contextually relevant to their peculiar situation. It seems sensible, then, to offer a number of scenarios where a reimagining of the class meeting and class leader might help local church leaders to better organise ministry, discipleship and pastoral care (see 3.7.8 below).
- 3.6.6. There is a question as to whether the word 'class' is anachronistic and whether it might be more useful to have a more obvious word for such a group. Given the changing nature of the church outlined in the previous two paragraphs it would seem wise not to identify one word to cover a variety of groups. Instead, it makes sense to identify the qualities or characteristics of the 'class meeting' and allow local leadership teams to name them however they wish (this seems to be the pattern in Fresh Expressions and emerging churches that are creating 'accountability groups' or Cell Churches that are creating smaller communities for discipleship and larger gatherings of worship).
- 3.6.7. From the historical documents it is suggested that such a group might include the following characteristics:
- Meets regularly (either physically or virtually);
 - Has a recognised 'leader' who also contributes to the broader vision and direction of the local church;

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

- Offers space for honest self-reflection and testimony;
- Works to build trust amongst members to enable honest and robust conversation that 'builds one another up in love';
- Enables the wider leadership of the church to be confident in the pastoral care of its members;
- Offers creative ways for members to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the faith;
- Creates opportunities for members to participate in the mission of the local church in practical, contextually relevant ways.

Local Churches are encouraged to reflect on where these characteristics are found within their church community.

3.6.8. Potential scenarios for reimagining the class meeting:

- **Scenario 1.**
A medium sized church has a number of 'house groups' and the local leadership team would like to see them become more effective in helping members 'grow in faith and holiness'. They decide to regularly call together the leaders of the various groups and use the 'characteristics' as a check list to encourage leaders to cultivate their groups and note opportunities for development and growth. They are able to identify and offer training for the leaders as well as identify potential new leaders to facilitate new groups.
- **Scenario 2.**
A small, rural, church is struggling to maintain its building and current mission and ministry. They decide to leave their building and become members of another Methodist church but their main 'gathering' will be in someone's house. They meet once a week and the 'leader' meets regularly with the church leadership team for support and mutual accountability.
- **Scenario 3.**
A circuit has appointed a number of 'local lay pastors' to help with the ministry and leadership of particular churches. They decide that the local lay pastors main role is to help a couple of the smaller churches become 'Classes' and to help some of the larger churches set up small groups. Both types of groups will organise themselves around the characteristics.
- **Scenario 4.**
A church has decided that they want to develop the new Methodist Way of Life (MWoL) that the Connexion has recently launched. They identify, train and appoint a few lay leaders to facilitate groups that will use the MWoL

questions and rhythm as a model for their group meetings. The leaders will meet with the church leadership team regularly and use the characteristics identified in 3.7.7 as a guide to identify the health of the MWoL groups.

- **Scenario 5.**

A number of Methodists live in an area where there is no local Methodist Church. Rather than travel 10 miles to the nearest Methodist Church the Superintendent encourages them to worship at their local Parish Church and to meet regularly as a ‘class meeting’ in someone’s home. The minister meets with the class once a quarter to encourage and support them and to learn of mission opportunities for the wider church.

3.6.9. Further scenarios

Since the 2020 Conference, the Evangelism and Growth Team have helpfully offered some further scenarios. Some of these are similar to those recorded above; some reflect changes influenced by COVID-19 pandemic regulations; and others show a focus on the evangelistic opportunities inherent in small group work. Some features within those scenarios include:

- Online meetings can reach those who are unable, or disinclined, to meet physically; a larger group can be reached, over an unlimited geographical area.
- Opportunities for evangelism can occur through small groups working together in the community, in varieties of imaginative ways. Those can include for example: food banks, community gardens, support of young families.
- Meetings need not, of course, be limited by church premises, which can sometimes be a barrier to those not accustomed to church attendance.
- Optimal numbers for on-line meetings are mentioned between six and ten.
- Hybrid arrangements are regarded as a future opportunity to enable fuller participation in groups.
- The suggestion that leaders of such groups should meet regularly with a coordinator, who can offer training, support and accountability.

3.7. The Importance of Pastoral Care

- 3.7.1. In the Methodist Church’s resource about pastoral care, *Encircled with Care*²⁴, the statement is made that: “A healthy Christian community is a safe place, where those within the Body of Christ and those in the neighbourhood and world beyond

24 This resource is now out of print.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

feel valued, loved and respected. Such valuing contributes to individual wellbeing, which in turn builds strong communities and is a witness to Christ". The Conference report *With Integrity and Skill*²⁵ follows this up by observing that: "The models of pastoral care offered by Churches and individual Christians need to reflect the nature of society and respond to the particular needs and aspirations of individuals, families and communities".

- 3.7.2. As well as the changes noted elsewhere in this report (see section 2 above), the COVID-19 pandemic has given Churches the opportunity to develop different models of pastoral care in response to the crisis. The traditional model of pastoral visiting, for example has been impossible to practise. In light of all these changes and the way in which pastoral ministry has developed, a number of things can be said about a renewed understanding of pastoral care:
- a. It is seen as part of the whole ministry of the Church;
 - b. It is concerned with the health of communities and not just individuals;
 - c. It is multi-faceted, expressed in a number of ways;
 - d. It is not just about helping with problems and distress but also about growth and discipleship;
 - e. It is concerned with the wider community and not just the Church;
 - f. It is about building relationships, which involves empathy, acceptance and trust;
 - g. It requires commitment and discipline;
 - h. It can be expressed formally and informally, through a variety of people and groups.
- 3.8. This section has explored a number of aspects of the ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry. Some specific recommendations have been made and other pieces of work are continuing. There are, however, a number of other matters raised in this section which may warrant some further consideration. It is therefore recommended that the Secretary of the Conference considers whether any further work is required in the light of the matters raised in this section and who might undertake it and reports to the Methodist Council in October 2021.

25 https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf08_18_With_Integrity_and_Skill.pdf

***RESOLUTIONS

26/5. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to consider whether any further work is required on the matters raised in section 3 of this report and to report to the Methodist Council in October 2021.

4. Local Lay-Pastors

4.1. The background and context of local pastoral ministry

4.1.1. Since this report was received by the 2020 Conference, further attention has been given to the variety of ways in which the ministry of Local Lay-Pastors has developed across the Connexion. There are many different forms of local pastoral ministry, including different kinds of chaplaincy, youth and children's work, pioneer ministry, work with particular community groups, and a wide variety of lay work posts, as well as the variety of formal and informal expressions of pastoral care. Over a number of years, as described in section 4.2 (below), a particular expression of local pastoral ministry has emerged as people have been appointed to a leadership role with a pastoral focus within a local context. The pastoral focus may be within an existing congregation or within the wider community, but the ministry is part of that of a Circuit. In many ways this is not a new kind of ministry (in the 1960s, for example, there was a Conference Committee for Lay Pastors), but it has grown and developed in many parts of the Connexion in recent years.

4.1.2. This report leads to the recommendation that an office of Local Lay-Pastor now be established. In part this is because the emergence of this ministry is recognised as a movement of the Spirit and some have asked for it to be more formally acknowledged for many years. It is also a response to the learning from different experiences of this ministry across the Connexion. Those who have worked on this report have considered a variety of creative examples of this ministry and have received feedback from churches and those currently engaged in this ministry. This further reflection has confirmed that the recommendation for an office of Local Lay-Pastor is also made in order to establish good practice in relation to this ministry. Whilst there are many examples of this ministry flourishing, there are also examples of difficult and painful experiences. The latter have highlighted the need for training, attention to boundaries (both interpersonal and around the role) and ensuring that there are clear and robust mechanisms of accountability, as well as there being better attention to endings, and to ensuring those appointed to such roles are suitably gifted and equipped.

4.1.3. The office of Local Lay-Pastor will not be a necessary office, and Local Churches and Circuits will discern where there is a need for ministry in this form alongside

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

other paid or unpaid roles in the life of the church. A Local Lay-Pastor will share with others in the pastoral ministry of the Circuit, focusing on particular communities, and will intentionally work in a collaborative manner. Not all Circuits will have Local Lay-Pastors. The role may also look different in different contexts and Local Lay-Pastors may be paid or voluntary positions. Whenever someone is appointed to this kind of ministry, however, good practice and attention to the areas outlined in this report are vital and it is therefore recommended that the creation of the office of Local Lay-Pastor is a vehicle for better ensuring this. The intention of this report is to establish a framework for the office which helps to ensure good practice whilst allowing flexibility for the role to develop according to the needs of the particular context.

4.2. The background and context of local pastoral ministry

- 4.2.1. Within the Methodist Church there has been a growing number of people being appointed to carry out particular pastoral and leadership responsibilities in local church, circuit, pioneering and specific language or cultural group contexts. The Connexional Team has developed resources for supporting and developing Local Lay-Pastors, and there have been persistent requests for a greater recognition of this ministry and some form of authorisation for those in such roles. At the same time, such appointments have sometimes prompted questions and concerns about how the Church is exercising its ministry safely and with robust accountability for people in positions of responsibility and power, and about how these roles relate to other ministries in the life of the Church. It is helpful to look at how these roles have re-developed.
- 4.2.2. In 1996, the Revd Dr Nigel Collinson, then the President of the Conference, introduced the concept of 'a pastor for every church' to the Methodist Church. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder*, he concluded that "‘a pastor for every church’, coupled with the genius of the Methodist circuit and connexional system, [would] give us a base for our local churches to become effective."²⁶ Although this vision never came to fruition, in the years that followed many Local Churches and Circuits established some form of this ministry.
- 4.2.3. The General Secretary's Report to the 2011 Conference²⁷ stated it was timely to revisit the issue of local pastoral ministry with some rigour and urgency. In response, the Ministries Committee carried out this work, establishing resources

²⁶ *The Methodist Recorder*, 14th November 1996.

²⁷ *General Secretary's Report* (2011), paragraphs 38-42.

for supporting local ministry²⁸ and defining those in such roles as:

“...providing a focused and recognised presence among a congregation and/or gathered community and in the wider community. They care for, enable, lead and represent the congregation and/or gathered community which they serve and represent the wider Church to the congregation and/or gathered community.”

- 4.2.4. There are now different examples of this form of ministry around the Connexion. A wide variety of people is being given significant pastoral and leadership responsibilities in Local Churches with varying degrees of discernment, support, training, and oversight in place. There is a range of different circumstances that bring about the appointment of people to local pastoral ministry, and the role takes different forms in different places. As this report has been compiled attention has been paid to the experiences and learning from different contexts.
- 4.2.5. The current situation is varied. In some Districts there has been much reflection on these issues with clear roles being established and procedures for recruitment, training, and oversight put in place. There is much to learn from these contexts. In other places these questions have not been addressed and a desire for further guidance has been expressed. Sometimes there has been an inappropriate matching of people to particular roles, a lack of collaborative working, some role confusion, and a lack of accountability.
- 4.2.6. The growth of local pastoral ministry has in part emerged as a response to need. It has partly developed from thinking around ‘a pastor in every church’ but is also different from what was then imagined, as contexts, needs and availability of resources have changed. If the development of this ministry is understood as a movement of the Spirit as well as a response to need, then it is time to consider whether it should be a more generally established role in the life of the Methodist Church. This report recommends that this particular expression of the local pastoral and leadership ministry of the Methodist Church is affirmed as a movement of the Spirit and that the office of Local Lay-Pastor now be established.
- 4.2.7. It is not envisaged that all Circuits will have Local Lay-Pastors, but that, in some contexts, Local Lay-Pastors might be an important part of the pastoral ministry of the circuit. A Local Lay-Pastor is not an alternative to a presbyter or a deacon

28 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/employees-and-volunteers/supporting-local-ministry>

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

as both orders of ministry have distinctive qualities and a particular place in the ministry and life of the Methodist Church. In creating the office of Local Lay-Pastor the Methodist Church recognises, affirms and celebrates lay pastoral ministry, recognising that this is one of the ways in which it may be expressed within a Circuit.

4.3. Concerns about creating a particular office of Local Lay-Pastor

Before outlining the recommendation more fully, it is important to note that whenever an office is created in the life of the Church there will be some concerns and challenges, and that there continue to be some questions about whether the creation of a formal office is needed or appropriate. As part of the discernment process, the Conference therefore needs to consider the following:

- 4.3.1. Current practice already enables people to be appointed to such roles, and offers flexibility as to the nature and type of appointment. There are many different forms of local pastoral ministry. In 1988 *The Ministry of the People of God* report, which developed partly in response to “the haphazard development of Lay Pastoral Assistant appointments,”²⁹ affirmed “that there is a distinctive and complementary ministry to that of the ordained ministry.”³⁰ Such ministry included “all those in a covenanted relationship with the church at district, circuit and local level, in pastoral, evangelistic and also administrative work related to the co-ordination and mission of the church. The work need neither be full time, nor even paid, provided that it cannot appropriately be done under the existing offices of class leader, local preacher etc.”³¹ Given the variety of ways in which local pastoral ministry is exercised, and the ability to create paid or voluntary lay roles, there are questions about why it is necessary to establish the particular office of Local Lay-Pastor when there is already the facility to appoint people to this type of role where it is deemed necessary by Local Churches or Circuits.
- 4.3.2. Local Lay-Pastors might be voluntary or employed. The relationship an office holder has with the church is different from the relationship that someone has as an employee. Employed Local Lay-Pastors would therefore have a dual relationship with the Methodist Church, and the implications of this need further consideration.
- 4.3.3. The flexibility in the ways in which the ministry of a Local Lay-Pastor may be exercised means that there is a risk that this is perceived as a ‘cheaper’ form

29 *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

30 *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

31 *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

of ordained ministry, or that there is a potential blurring of boundaries, and there are concerns about how this ministry impacts on and relates to other ministries, including those of pastoral visitors and church stewards.

- 4.3.4. There are different ways to respond to the challenges the Methodist Church faces. Do we have too many buildings and is it time for a radical reconsideration of our structure and priorities? Should we, alternatively, seek to appoint people to undertake a greater number of administrative and institutional governance tasks so that ministers and those with the appropriate gifts can give more time to pastoral ministry and relational involvement in the local context?
- 4.3.5. There are questions as to whether what is proposed is achievable, given the sometimes limited pool of people for a particular appointment and the need for people to be suitable for the role of Local Lay-Pastor.
- 4.3.6. The role of Local Lay-Pastor is complementary to ordained ministry, and it is a vocation which also requires discernment. There are particular questions around how such discernment might take place if someone explores this ministry after they have candidated for ordained ministry but were not selected for initial ministerial training, depending on the reasons as to why it was determined that ordained ministry was not the appropriate path. Attention to the shape of line-management, supervision and the pastoral care offered will be vital. For those who feel a call to some form of pastoral and leadership ministry in the Methodist Church, the office of Local Lay-Pastor might be one form in which this could be expressed.
- 4.4. An office of Local Lay-Pastor
 - 4.4.1. After careful consideration, it is recommended that this particular expression of the local pastoral and leadership ministry of the Methodist Church now be established as an office in the life of the Church. This will ensure that there is clarity about the nature of the role and appropriate accountability for a position of significant responsibility. It is hoped that this will also create space for this ministry to happen in different ways, for it to be responsive to contextual needs, and to enable it to develop further as the wider context changes. The response to some of the issues and challenges outlined above are contained within the outline for the office below. Such an office would not be obligatory. It would be an office to which Circuits 'may' but not 'shall' appoint. For many Circuits there is not a need, or it might not be appropriate, to have someone undertake this role. Nonetheless, it is recommended that an office of Local Lay-Pastor be created.
 - 4.4.2. There are many offices in the life of the Methodist Church and these are defined in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*. It should be

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

noted that in 2013 the Ministries Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee considered a proposal that there be connexional authorisation for persons exercising local lay pastoral ministries. Both committees felt that this was inappropriate at that time, not least because only those exercising particular oversight responsibilities are authorised by and for the whole Connexion (ie presbyters, deacons and local preachers). Individuals undertaking other offices in the life of the Church are not connexionally authorised for a life-long ministry, but are appointed within a specific context to undertake a particular role for a period of time. The way in which people are authorised varies, but usually consists of appointment by the Church Council, Circuit Meeting or other relevant body followed by some form of commissioning service. The recommendation for an office of Local Lay-Pastor is different from the concept of connexional authorisation. A Local Lay-Pastor would be a local, not a connexional, role to which people would be locally appointed by the relevant Circuit Meeting for a specific period of time. Like other offices in the life of the Church, someone would be a Local Lay-Pastor only for as long as their particular appointment lasts. When the role ends, the person ceases to be a Local Lay-Pastor, although they then have a particular set of skills and experience that may equip them for similar roles in other places.

- 4.4.3. As the office of Local Lay-Pastor is a representative role in a specific community or communities then those who undertake it should be members of the Methodist Church in Britain. It is also a lay office and not open to ordained ministers from other churches. The ways in which ministers from other churches can serve in the Methodist Church in Britain are set out in Standing Order 730. This is currently being reviewed and further reflection will be brought to the 2022 Conference.
- 4.4.4. There have been several discussions about nomenclature, as people occupying these roles are referred to in a variety of ways. The term 'Local Lay-Pastor' is frequently used, including in the resources on the Methodist Church website. Although there is the potential for the term 'pastor' to be confusing because in some other Churches and in some cultures it is used to denote the ordained minister, 'pastor' is not a term which the Methodist Church generally uses and is therefore less open to misinterpretation than the term 'minister'. The title 'Lay Minister' would be inappropriate in the light of the Conference decision that the term 'minister' refers only to an ordained person.³² The recommended term is therefore 'Local Lay-Pastor', and the full term should be used to emphasise that this is a local and a lay ministry.

32 *Ministers, Presbyters and Deacons: Signalling Vocation, Clarifying Identity* (2008), paragraph 2.5 and Resolution 52/2.

- 4.4.5. In establishing the office of Local Lay-Pastor, it is intended that the framework for this ministry is enabling rather than prescriptive, open to development and allowing the office to be undertaken and expressed in different ways. The precise shape of the role will depend on the local context and how it fits with the way in which the pastoral ministry of the Local Church (or Churches) is expressed.
- 4.4.6. It is recommended that the core elements of the proposed office are:
- a. it is a lay role;
 - b. it is a representative role and therefore the Local Lay-Pastor will be a member of the Methodist Church in Britain. Local Lay-Pastors will be members of the relevant Church Councils and Circuit Meeting;
 - c. it involves some pastoral and leadership responsibilities;
 - d. oversight (and thus pastoral and leadership responsibility) is shared. The Local Lay-Pastor will work with the presbyter who has pastoral responsibility for the relevant Local Church(es) (and sometimes within a wider team). The office of Local Lay-Pastor does not subsume other offices in the life of the church and a Local Lay-Pastor will work collaboratively with ministers and lay office holders such as church stewards, pastoral visitors and local preachers. The role description will make clear the lines of accountability and the relationship of the Local Lay-Pastor to those who also have pastoral and leadership responsibilities;
 - e. each appointment is for a specific period of time, and there will be a clear process for reviewing both the need for the appointment and whether it is appropriate for the particular person to continue in the role. When an appointment is made, consideration will be given to the issues which are likely to be involved when it comes to an end and how these will be handled;
 - f. There will be appropriate and robust support, supervision, training and accountability (see further section 4.5);
 - g. Local Lay-Pastors will not normally have authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper, nor lead services of baptism (see further section 4.4.9).
- 4.4.7. It is recommended that Local Lay-Pastors are appointed by the Circuit Meeting to serve in a specified Local Church or Churches, and that the start of an appointment is marked by an appropriate form of commissioning service. This

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

will enable responsibility for oversight and accountability, support and training to reside in the Circuit Meeting. This may be helpful when appointments are reviewed, come to an end, or if any difficult issues arise. If the role is to be paid then the usual employment and safer recruitment procedures will apply and a contract will be issued. If the role is voluntary then a Circuit may wish to involve someone from outside the Circuit in the appointment process where appropriate, and a licence will be issued.

- 4.4.8. Across the Connexion there are already many people in Local Lay-Pastor roles who have been appointed in different ways, with varied expectations and under a variety of patterns of oversight. There will be a time of transition, but it is recommended that by 1 September 2025 all Local Lay-Pastors will have completed the core training, have a 'live' training profile and be licensed.
- 4.4.9. Sacramental ministry is not part of the ministry of a Local Lay-Pastor. Presiding at the Lord's Supper and baptising belong to presbyteral ministry and will usually be undertaken by presbyters in the Circuit.
- a. It is recognised that some parts of the Connexion are struggling with eucharistic deprivation. The Methodist Church already makes provision for this, however, through granting authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper where the Conference discerns that such situations exist and that there is an appropriate person to undertake this ministry temporarily. Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper should not be applied for, nor granted, as part of the role of a Local Lay-Pastor. It might be that there are occasions when a Local Lay-Pastor is discerned to be the most appropriate person in the Circuit to have an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper, but this will be because of their standing in the Circuit and not as part of their role as a Local Lay-Pastor.
 - b. Baptism is normally administered by a presbyter.³³ Where local considerations so require it may be administered by a deacon appointed to the Circuit³⁴ or by a local preacher with the permission of the Superintendent. In an emergency any member of the church may baptise, but generally discernment about who

33 Or by a presbyteral probationer appointed to the Circuit, or a person authorised to serve as a presbyter who is appointed to fulfil presbyteral duties in the Circuit under Standing Order 733, or a person granted the status of associate presbyter who is permitted to undertake such an act of ministry in the particular Local Church concerned under Standing Order 733A. (SO 010A.)

34 Or a diaconal probationer appointed to the Circuit, or by a person authorised to serve as a deacon who is appointed to fulfil diaconal duties in the Circuit under Standing Order 733, or a person granted the status of associate deacon who is permitted to undertake such an act of ministry in the particular Local Church concerned under Standing Order 733A. (SO 010A.)

should most appropriately baptise – if not the presbyter – is shared and is not an individual decision. Baptism should not form part of the role of the Local Lay-Pastor.

- 4.5. The appointment, support, training and accountability of Local Lay-Pastors
 - 4.5.1. The accountability of Local Lay-Pastors is vital (not least because people will be in positions of power), and therefore there will be robust selection, appointment, training and line-management processes. Supervision will be required. These will primarily be the responsibility of the Circuit, although there may be sharing of resources across Circuits/Districts and further consideration is needed regarding any connexional resources.
 - 4.5.2. Whether the post is voluntary or paid, full-time or part-time, it is important that there is a recruitment and appointment process and that a written agreement is drawn up. This will clarify the parameters and expectations of the appointment including areas of responsibility, the length of time of the appointment, the nature of the Local Lay-Pastor's relationship with those holding pastoral charge and other pastoral and leadership positions, and structures of accountability, oversight and supervision. If it is a paid post then the usual employment processes will need to be followed and a contract issued.
 - 4.5.3. It is recommended that all Local Lay-Pastors will be licensed for a particular period of time. A licence is temporary, will be reviewed, and is revocable. The licence will be issued by the Circuit Meeting and will be conditional upon the Local Lay-Pastor having a 'live' training record (see 4.5.6). All Local Lay-Pastors will have some form of commissioning service.
 - 4.5.4. Local Lay-Pastors will undergo appropriate training to ensure they have sufficient understanding of Methodist identity, issues of safeguarding and boundaries, and pastoral care and theology, and to ensure that they are appropriately equipped for the particular role and context. There are already various forms of training available and it is recognised that some people will already have considerable experience of pastoral ministry. It is recommended that all Local Lay-Pastors should complete some initial training which will comprise some connexional core requirements as well as training that the Circuit determines will help to equip the particular person for the particular appointment. Alongside those elements that are agreed to be necessary for the basic initial training, there should be an emphasis on continuing learning.
 - 4.5.5. It is therefore recommended that a training pathway for Local Lay-Pastors is created, recognising that many elements of this already exist. There will be three elements to this:

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

- a. Core training, which all Local Lay-Pastors will be expected to complete. A record of those who have completed the core training will be kept within the Connexional Team. If somebody has completed the training for one appointment and subsequently takes on a role in a different context then they will not be required to undertake the core training again.
- b. Further initial training for each new appointment, which will be agreed with the Circuit in order to ensure that someone is equipped for the specific role in that particular context and that they are up to date in a particular area. There will need to be flexibility as to how and when it takes place, and for account to be taken of any other training and experience the person has. It is nonetheless important that there is some training in these areas in order to ensure that those undertaking the role of Local Lay-Pastor are properly equipped for the responsibilities they will have.
- c. Continuing development, which all Local Lay-Pastors will be expected to engage in. Alongside the core training there will be other modules of training offered connexionally, including through the Learning Network or connexional training institutions, or other courses or forms of training may be appropriate. It may be possible for some training to be developed and delivered locally, such as through the Learning Network, and it may link with other training such as safeguarding.

4.5.6. It is therefore recommended that the Ministries Committee develops some competencies for the office of Local Lay-Pastor and creates a training pathway as described. A connexional training record will be kept. This will be established once someone has completed the core training and all additional training can be recorded. In order to keep the record 'live' Local Lay-Pastors will be expected to demonstrate that they have engaged in some continued development and have kept their supervision record up to date. If the record is not 'live' and someone wishes to undertake the role of Local Lay-Pastor then further training requirements should be identified and a programme for meeting them drawn up.

4.5.7. If these recommendations are accepted then it is important to note that there are many people already appointed to local pastoral ministry roles and there will therefore need to be a period of transition. Circuits, Local Churches and Local Lay-Pastors are, however, encouraged to embody good practice and to access appropriate training as soon as it is available. From September 2022 all those taking up new appointments as Local Lay-Pastors will be expected to complete the core training. By September 2025 it is expected that all Local Lay-Pastors will have completed the core training and be appropriately licensed.

- 4.5.8. There may be issues of appropriate dress and it needs to be clear that Local Lay-Pastors should not wear clerical dress. Some work by the Ministries Committee indicated that a standard lanyard identifying the person as a Local Lay-Pastor in the Methodist Church might be suitable.
- 4.5.9. Particular attention should be given to the issues around the ending of the role from the outset. If the office-holder is likely to remain within the Local Church or Circuit then clarity about appropriate boundaries, or the process for establishing appropriate boundaries, and how any difficult ending is to be managed should be agreed from the start. It might be helpful for the ending to be acknowledged within an act of worship. Particular difficulties can arise when someone undertakes similar responsibilities in a voluntary capacity, when someone else takes on the role, or when an ending has been unwanted by one party or problematic in some way. (See section 3.6 above.)
- 4.6. There was sufficient affirmation for the proposal for the creation of an office of Local Lay-Pastor to bring it to the Conference. Establishing robust selection, appointment, line-management, supervision, training and other processes of accountability and support will help to address some of the concerns and ensure that good and safer practice is embedded across the Connexion, and it has been recognised that this ministry is already flourishing in parts of the Connexion. It is therefore recommended that the Conference establishes an office of Local Lay-Pastor.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 26/6. The Conference adopts the recommendations in 4.4 of this report that the office of Local Lay-Pastor be established.**
- 26/7. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference in order to establish the office of Local Lay-Pastor.**
- 26/8. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to bring the competencies and criteria for the role of Local Lay-Pastor to the 2022 Conference.**
- 26/9. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to explore any issues around employment of Local Lay-Pastors and establish the content of a licence for Local Lay-Pastors.**

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

- 26/10. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to establish a training pathway and appropriate training resources for Local Lay-Pastors.**
- 26/11. The Conference directs that from 1 September 2022 completion of the core training will be an essential requirement for any new appointment of a licensed Local Lay-Pastor.**
- 26/12. The Conference directs that from 1 September 2025 all Local Lay Pastors will have completed the core training and be appropriately licensed.**

5. Itinerancy and Stationing

5.1. Itinerancy

- 5.1.1. For some years there have been questions around the extent to which itinerancy is lived out in practice. The 2018 Conference noted “the potential dissonance between the Methodist Church’s understanding of itinerancy and experiences of the stationing processes. In practice many ministers are not available to be stationed anywhere within the Connexion and this has prompted questions about the role and place of itinerancy in the Methodist Church today.”³⁵
- 5.1.2. The way in which presbyters and deacons are stationed differs. Deacons, as part of their discipline within the Methodist Diaconal Order, are expected to be available to serve wherever they are needed and to be ready to move whenever needed. Deacons are matched directly to stations by the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee on the recommendation of the Warden. The Diaconal Stationing Committee seeks, through prayer and conversation, to discern the station in which their gifts and graces might best be used. Great pastoral care is taken to ensure the well-being of the deacons, the members of their household and the Circuits in which they serve. Except for initial stationing, in which student presbyters and Ministers of Other Conferences and Churches (MOCCs) are stationed to their first appointment in the British Methodist Church by direct stationing, presbyters are matched with stations through the Stationing Matching Group meetings (or, later in the connexional year, by the Stationing Action Group). This enables presbyters and Circuits to meet each other before a match is agreed. Although presbyters and deacons are matched with stations in different ways, it is the Conference which stations all ministers on an annual basis.
- 5.1.3. Although deacons and presbyters are stationed in different ways, a variety of

³⁵ *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part C, 4.1

factors, relevant to both orders, have been identified as challenging the concept of itinerancy (although deacons can and do remain responsive to direct stationing and all that that means in terms of itinerancy). These include:

- a. Increasingly, the Church wishes to honour the calling and vocation of ministers' households. The *Ministry in the Methodist Church* draft Statement encourages the Church to recognise, own and support the ministry of those who are called to do and to be something outside the walls of the church. Ministers with partners whose work is limited to particular areas of the country continue to wrestle with what it means to be in multiple covenant relationships, especially when the responsibilities inherent in these relationships seem to conflict.
- b. For the interests of the ministers' wellbeing it is important that they are able to take into account where their friends, family and systems of support are.
- c. Children's schooling is often cited as a factor, especially because of the difficulty of registering a child for a school place before the family is resident in the area.
- d. With an ageing population, many ministers and/or their partners are primary or secondary caregivers for family members or feel the need to be able to visit easily in an emergency.
- e. Some ministers and/or members of their households have particular health needs that limit their deployability (eg due to the need to be near a hospital with a particular specialism). There may also be factors concerning the accessibility of the manse that need to be taken into account.
- f. Some researchers in other denominations have proposed that the evidence suggests that church growth is likely to happen best somewhere between the fifth and twelfth years of a ministry. Some have suggested, in light of this, that the Conference could decide to retain itinerant ministry (with regard to deployability and discipline) but with longer normative appointments (moving ministers less frequently).
- g. Experiences from fresh expression and pioneering contexts and from work with particular language and cultural communities have highlighted that, for contextual mission and ministry, the practice of itinerancy can sometimes be viewed as threatening. On the other hand, it is sometimes seen as helpful in ensuring that a particular community or project is not reliant on, or identified with, one individual, but that oversight and ministry are shared within that particular community and within the Methodist Church.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

- h. Mission studies suggest that contextual mission is important but itinerancy is often perceived to militate against this. It has been suggested that more people might offer for ministry or remain in ministry if this tension could be engaged with more creatively. The circuit system is sometimes seen to make demands that militate against a deeply contextual engagement in ministry. Are the patterns by which we structured ourselves for mission 250 years ago fit for the missional task now?
- i. There are concerns about whether itinerancy makes assumptions about the portability of individuals, recognising that all ministers have particular vulnerabilities and limitations, as well as gifts and graces. The extent to which ministers feel empowered to move to unfamiliar contexts and take on new challenges has also been questioned, as has the level of support available (including in relation to discernment) thus enabling them to flourish and feel valued. The lack of choice in the current stationing process impacts on this, perhaps more than itinerancy as such. All life is lived in social locations and some places put enormous burdens on people. British Methodism today is more culturally diverse and the contexts and tasks are more varied. We need to pay attention to that and to take great care where we send people. To some extent everyone has limits to their deployability.

5.1.4. Itinerancy has also been viewed and experienced in positive ways. Some are invigorated by the idea of moving from time to time to new contexts and the expectation of new opportunities in ministry. Some are inspired by the potential to exercise ministry in different ways in different places. The concept of critical appointments has recently been introduced in the stationing matching process, and it has been found that presbyters are more willing to move further or to be sent to a context they had not considered if they can see that there is a purpose to them being sent to such an appointment, and matching rates have been higher.

5.1.5. In conversations about itinerancy different aspects may be emphasised:

- a. geographical deployability: itinerancy means being willing and able to move anywhere in the Connexion;
- b. frequency: itinerancy means moving at least once every five years; or
- c. discipline: itinerancy means being willing to serve wherever the Conference discerns a need, for any period of time.

5.1.6. In the early years of Methodism, purposeful and well-planned itinerancy enabled John Wesley to make the best use of slender resources to ensure that the gospel message reached new areas of the country. Wesley's preachers were expected

to keep on the move, visiting the established societies and forming new ones. They could respond to need and opportunities and itinerancy also emphasised that the Methodist preachers were 'extraordinary messengers', different from the beneficed and parish-based clergy of the Church of England and the settled pastors of Old Dissent. As Methodists soon became a movement distinct from the regular parochial structures, Methodist preachers soon became more than itinerant evangelists, as a parallel ecclesial structure of bands, classes, societies and circuits emerged, all 'in connexion with' Wesley and the Conference. The pattern of ministry in the 18th century was flexible and categories were fluid. Individuals moved fairly freely between itinerancy and 'location', and the categories of travelling preacher, semi-itinerant and local preacher were determined by circumstance and availability. Typically a travelling preacher might get married and settle down, cease to itinerate, and become a 'local' preacher. In the years after John Wesley's death in 1791 the distinction between 'travelling' and 'local' preachers hardened with the travelling preachers evolving into the presbyterate, and in the early years appointments did not extend beyond three years. Historically, some of the case for itinerancy has rested on the benefits of change and variety. More, though, has been to do with finding the most effective ways of deploying ministers for mission.

- 5.1.7. Itinerancy thus became part of Methodism's understanding of ordained ministry and is primarily about the deployment of ministers for mission. Today it is clear that many ministers have legitimate geographical and other limitations at particular points in their lives due to, for example, children's education, their partner's work or vocation, or a family member's health. Some ministers may feel called to ministry in a particular context, for example within particular cultural or language groups, to some form of chaplaincy, within a particular sector of society, or in a particular place. Our current stationing processes already have provisions that enable these factors to be taken into consideration in the deployment of ministers, but they may need some revision to ensure that they are clear, explicit, transparent and robust (see 5.2 below). Particular consideration of what used to be called 'Ministers in Local Appointment' (MLAs) can be found in section 6.
- 5.1.8. Itinerancy continues to be part of the Methodist Church's understanding of ordained ministry and a pragmatic response to God's call to the Methodist Church for the sake of the world. It is, however, only one aspect of the covenant relationship between ministers and the Conference. It does not mean that any minister can go anywhere at any time.
- 5.1.9. The Conference is asked to adopt the following understanding of itinerancy:
 - a. Itinerancy is a characteristic of the Methodist Church's ordained ministry. It

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

signifies that Methodist ministers are connexional people who are available to the Conference for deployment for mission according to the needs and priorities of the Methodist Church. It indicates that no appointment is open-ended and that a minister will serve in a particular context only for a period of time;

- b. Itinerancy is one aspect of the covenant relationship that ministers have with the Conference. The Conference stations ministers on an annual basis, but within the current stationing processes only a portion of ministers are available for deployment each year, and account is taken of legitimate limitations on where they might be deployed. At the same time, the covenant relationship implies a readiness upon the part of the individual minister to be open to the needs of the Connexion as a whole at any point in their ministerial journey;
- c. Itinerancy indicates that a minister's primary relationship is with the Conference and not the context to which they are deployed. On reception into Full Connexion Methodist ministers enter into the covenant relationship with the Conference in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry. Presbyters and deacons who are temporarily released from appointment in order to study or serve in a different context are not released from being stationed, nor from the covenant relationship of being in Connexion.

As the Conference discerns where it will station its ministers it will pay attention to the needs of the Church and to the ministers' gifts, graces, experience, sense of calling, and any particular needs including family circumstances, health and legitimate geographical limitations. It recognises that there will be points in many ministers' lives when they will be freer to travel anywhere in the Connexion than at others. It is, however, the Conference that sends ministers to particular appointments. How the Conference decides where ministers are deployed, how it takes these particular things into consideration, and how it ensures that any call to a specific context or particular kind of ministry is a matter of shared discernment by the individual and the Church through its processes of stationing matching.

***RESOLUTION

26/13. The Conference adopts the understanding of itinerancy in paragraph 5.1.9 and directs the Ministries Committee to ensure that it is brought to the attention of all potential candidates for ministry, student ministers, and probationers, and that it is drawn to the attention of ministers as part of the invitation and re-invitation processes.

5.2. Stationing

- 5.2.1. “The process by which invitations are offered and accepted, and the stations are made, is one through which the parties concerned and, ultimately, the Conference are attempting to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the presbyters and deacons and to the Circuits about how the Church’s resources, in terms of its ordained ministers, are best used.”³⁶ Across the years different processes of stationing matching have been used, and there have always been questions about whether the current processes are the best way of discerning how ministers are to be deployed. Although many of the processes in relation to stationing are the same for deacons and presbyters, there is a key difference in that deacons are stationed directly. Probationers of both orders of ministry are also stationed directly.
- 5.2.2. In 2002 the *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* report envisaged that, within the stationing matching process, some Circuits would offer appointments that might be full-time or part-time, stipendiary or self-supporting, and that other kinds of appointments might also be available within the process (for example, chaplaincy appointments and those within the theological education institutions). Similarly presbyters would also state what type of arrangement they were seeking. In practice, the appointments offered by Circuits and sought by ministers within the stationing matching process are primarily full-time and stipendiary. The 2017 Conference acknowledged that the current stationing matching process does not fully reflect the flexible patterns of ministry envisaged in 2002.
- 5.2.3. The vision of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* has not come to fruition for largely pragmatic reasons. Many of the appointments within the Connexional Team are not within the stationing matching process because they are open to lay and ordained. There has also been a shift in the way in which chaplaincy appointments are made as many institutions now employ their own chaplains rather than inviting churches to send people. It is felt that some work towards a stationing matching process which has a greater variety of appointments, including part time, part-

36 The Code of Practice for all involved in the Invitation and Stationing Process, 2019

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

specialist and maybe for different periods of time is possible: but it also requires Circuits and ministers to identify and offer these things.]

5.2.4. During the exploration of the Methodist Church's current patterns of ordained ministry, a number of matters arose:

- a. An underlying factor is **the state of the Church**. There are examples of ministers beginning appointments where the profile does not entirely reflect the reality, or where there is cultural depression and anxiety and too great a workload, creating distrust of the stationing matching process. More honest conversation about the reality of different contexts is vital, as is prayer.
- b. The Methodist Church does not have a separate category of **non-stipendiary ministry**. All ministers in active work and appointed to stations within the control of the Church are entitled to receive a stipend (or an appropriate proportion thereof if they undertake their particular duties on a part time basis). A stipend is a living allowance, not a wage, and it is part of the support which is required and which the Methodist Church provides. Ministers do not have to receive the stipend, however, and a Circuit or other body responsible for a full-time or part-time appointment within the control of the Church may apply for a minister or probationer to be stationed without payment of a stipend.³⁷
- c. Although there are some opportunities for **vocational discernment** for ministers, more would be welcome. Each minister brings particular gifts, experiences and interests, which might be better encouraged and nurtured so that individuals and the Church as a whole might flourish. During the course of someone's ministry it is hoped that there will be opportunities to develop and use particular gifts and serve in different contexts, often alongside and or as part of circuit ministry. There is both a tension and a balance between the needs and gifts of the individual and the needs of, and opportunities within, the Church; and a tension between the Church as it is and what people feel called to and what they would like or envisage the Church to be. At particular points, such as when an appointment is coming to an end, ministers seek to discern their next steps and further opportunities to explore what that might be and whether it might have a particular focus would be welcome (for example, superintendency, rural ministry, or some form of chaplaincy as part of a circuit appointment). There is discernment in the current processes, such as through conversations with the Chair or Warden and the ministerial development review (MDR) and supervision processes,

37 Standing Order 801(6)

but more intentional reflection on vocation at particular times might be helpful. The Church, similarly, could further reflect on how it discerns the gifts necessary for particular roles, such as Superintendents and Chairs.

- d. **Part-time appointments** seem more abundant than any study of the stationing profiles might indicate. It is important to clarify that someone is not a minister part-time as ordained ministry is life-long and a Methodist minister is always under the discipline of the Conference. Some ministers, however, undertake particular duties on a part-time basis and there is great variety in such patterns of working: some ministers undertake ministerial duties for part of their time and some combine a part-time circuit appointment with other roles within and outside the Methodist Church.

5.2.5. Following further reflection on the nature of itinerancy and re-consideration of the vision of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*, it is timely that some aspects of our stationing matching processes are reviewed. It is therefore recommended that:

- a. The process for presbyters offering limited geographical deployment is reviewed so that it is clear and transparent, and better reflects the situation of those who are not limited to a particular Circuit but still have geographical limitations (for example, to a District or a few Districts). This process will need to be extended to encompass the proposals in section 6 (below), if the Conference so agrees.
- b. The facility for greater flexibility in the length of appointments within the stationing matching process is explored, including the possibility of ministers indicating that they are willing to offer, for example, three, five or seven years in a particular appointment (instead of the current five) before there is a re-invitation process. A minimum of three years and a maximum of seven is suggested as appropriate lengths of time. It is therefore recommended that the Standing Order 543(1) is amended to indicate some flexibility by inserting the word 'normally'. The new Standing Order 543(1) would read: "Subject to Standing Order 547(2) the initial invitation to a presbyter shall **normally** be for a period of five years, no annual invitation being necessary during that period." Ministers and circuits are also encouraged to remember that current periods of invitation or deemed invitation can be curtailed and that the process for this is set out in Standing Order 544. Unfortunately curtailment is sometimes seen as a process to be instigated as a means of resolving a difficult situation, but there are often positive, creative and missional reasons why curtailment might be helpful. For example the circumstances of the circuit or minister may change, or the missional priorities of the circuit may be revised.

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

- c. There should be exploration of whether ministers who are not in a particular year's stationing matching process could indicate if they are willing (or ready) to move early, or if they wish to change from full- to part-time duties (or vice versa). For example, some ministers who are approaching or due to sit down might indicate if they are interested in continuing in active ministry but with stability in location and a reduced workload.
- d. There is a review of how particular gifts are identified and made known within the stationing matching process. For example, there are some particular appointments that go into the stationing matching process, but the person particularly suited for that appointment might not be in the stationing matching process that year. The Stationing Committee may also wish to consider whether and how circuit profiles might be made available for all ministers to see.
- e. There is further reflection on local arrangements, including appointments which are less than half time. The wider Methodist Church does not necessarily know about them all and such appointments appear to contradict other principles and raise questions about connexional oversight.

***RESOLUTIONS

26/14. The Conference directs that Standing Order 543(1) is amended as follows:

Subject to Standing Order 547(2) the initial invitation to a presbyter shall **normally** be for a period of five years, no annual invitation being necessary during that period.

26/15. The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to review the aspects of the stationing matching process described in paragraph 5.2.5 and report to the 2022 Conference.

6. Serving in specific contexts

- 6.1. Prior to 2003 the Methodist Church had a number of ministers in local appointments (MLAs). These arrangements only ever applied to presbyters. We now use the term 'minister' for both presbyters and deacons, so this section explores the possibility of more explicitly embedding opportunities for presbyters to serve specific contexts within the stationing processes.

- 6.2. The category of MLA was removed because those serving in MLA appointments were sometimes perceived, listed and treated differently from other presbyters, and the Conference decided that there would be only one category of minister, although presbyters may serve in different ways. The potential for a presbyter to be stationed in a local appointment was therefore never abolished, yet there seems to be a lack of awareness that this kind of presbyteral ministry is still possible. Some of those who previously began their presbyteral ministry as MLAs felt that this was a positive entry point and subsequently went on to have an itinerant ministry. Currently, however, a 'local appointment' is related to someone who has what is known as 'limited geographical deployability' and this fails to take account of those who feel called to a particular context; for example, a particular language and cultural group, a fresh expression or pioneering context, or to a particular community and geographical context.
- 6.3. Within the present system, the following are already possible:
 - 6.3.1. to candidate with limited geographical deployability (which requires a specific appointment to be identified and does not guarantee that there will definitely be another appropriate appointment at the end of that time);
 - 6.3.2. to offer limited geographical deployability at any stage of presbyteral ministry (although, again, there is no guarantee of an appointment);
 - 6.3.3. to candidate for appointments outside the control of the Church (with the expectation that they will contribute to the life of the Circuit in some way);
 - 6.3.4. to candidate for self-supporting presbyteral ministry;
 - 6.3.5. to candidate for presbyteral ministry with a view to having a part-time appointment (but there is no guarantee of an appointment).
- 6.4. Presbyters, deacons and probationers are stationed in a variety of ways (such as in a circuit appointment, in a chaplaincy appointment and with permission to study, for example). The full range of ways in which ministers may be stationed are listed in Standing Order 780, but the work for this report has highlighted that a review of this Standing Order would be timely. It is therefore recommended that the Conference directs this to take place.
- 6.5. The Methodist Church recognises that some ministers have other vocational calls which shape where they are able to serve for a period of time. It also recognises that some feel called or have particular gifts to serve a specific context, and that they may have other vocational responsibilities including to a partner or other

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

family members. This is taken into account during the process of conversations with the Warden during the stationing process for deacons, but is not always explicit within the stationing process for presbyters. Presbyters in local, pioneer and specific language and cultural appointments can enhance the mission and ministry of the Church, and there is also a potential impact on the ability of the Church to send presbyters where needed if a large number of ministers are only able to be sent within a limited area of the Connexion. Whilst re-emphasising that discernment of call is not just a matter of individual conviction but also something which the Church recognises, both in terms of the individual's gifts and potential and in relation to the needs and ministry of the Church as a whole, it is recommended that there is a clear means of enabling presbyters to be stationed to local appointments, including to particular contexts, within the stationing matching process.

6.6. It is therefore suggested that:

- 6.6.1. The category of 'limited geographical deployability' is renamed and expanded to include ministry in a particular context (such as those identified in 6.3 above). The intention is to embed more explicitly in the candidating and stationing matching processes the possibility of appointments for those whose geographical deployability is limited (either for a period of time or more permanently), and those who feel called to a particular context (whether a geographical, cultural, language-specific or pioneering context).
- 6.6.2. Such appointments will require an appointment to be identified (and this may be for up to seven years – see the suggestion in 5.2.5.b above). If an initial appointment then this would form part of the candidating process, otherwise this would be enabled through the Stationing Advisory Committee. If the appointment continues and the presbyter wishes to continue in the appointment beyond that time, then the usual re-invitation process will apply. This will be a key point of discernment for the individual presbyter and the particular context within the framework of the needs of the Connexion. It will need to be clear that after the initial appointment ends there can be no guarantee that a similar second appointment will be available, nor can it be guaranteed that a re-invitation process will result in an extension to the appointment being granted.
- 6.6.3. Presbyteral candidates, presbyters and Circuits which are considering such appointments are encouraged to reflect on the following points.
 - a. The covenant relationship that all ministers have with the Conference and that presbyters in such appointments remain under the discipline of the Conference. There is an expectation that all appointments are time-limited.

- b. Further reflection on endings and the different issues involved, including: a discussion of boundaries and expectations if the presbyter remains in the community (particularly if the appointment is not filled); the possibility that the outcome of a re-invitation process may not be as hoped; managing ongoing relationships where the dynamics and nature of the relationship change; and an awareness of the different potential power dynamics.
- c. There are realistic expectations about what the Church can offer (for example, that there is an awareness of the circumstances in which a second appointment may not be guaranteed) and that there needs to be a reasonableness about potential commutes and a willingness to consider serving in different contexts. There is also often flexibility and different opportunities within or across Districts, and the individual's circumstances and call within ordained ministry may change over time.
- d. The ways in which relationships will change, if the candidate or presbyter is already known within the context, and the different role and responsibilities that the presbyter will have in terms of interpersonal relationships.

It is also recommended that those considering such appointments have a conversation with the Chair of District at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.6.4. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given as to whether any additional processes of discernment are required within the candidating, training and stationing processes for those who feel called to serve as presbyters in pioneer and cultural language-specific appointments, and that the possibility for presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural/language appointments is embedded in these processes and better communicated. It is also recommended that those involved in the candidating, training and stationing matching processes (and particularly Chairs, Lay Stationing representatives, those in the Learning Network, and Superintendents) are further equipped to ensure that they are aware of all these possibilities.

***RESOLUTIONS

26/16. The Conference directs the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to review Standing Order 780 and report to the 2022 Conference.

26/17. The Conference directs the Stationing and Ministries Committees to ensure

26. Changing Patterns of Ministry

that within the candidating, training and stationing processes:

- a. there is a clear process for enabling some presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural/language appointments;**
- b. that this possibility is clearly communicated to those involved in the candidating, training and stationing matching processes; and**
- c. there is guidance for Circuits and presbyters considering such appointments;**

and report to the 2022 Conference.

7. Conclusion

Having undertaken reflection on aspects of the Methodist Church's changing patterns of ministry, the Faith and Order, Stationing and Ministries Committees bring a number of resolutions to the 2021 Conference for decision.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

26/1. The Conference receives the Report.

26/2. The Conference amends Standing Order 634 as set out in paragraph 3.2.6 of the report.

26/3. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to produce some liturgical guidance for marking the ending of appointments in a service of worship.

26/4. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to produce a resource which includes guidance for good endings.

26/5. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to consider whether any further work is required on the matters raised in section 3 of this report and to report to the Methodist Council in October 2022.

26/6. The Conference adopts the recommendations in 4.4 of this report that the office of Local Lay-Pastor be established.

26/7. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference in order to establish the office of Local Lay-Pastor.

26/8. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to bring the competencies and criteria for the role of Local Lay-Pastor to the 2022 Conference.

26/9. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to explore any issues around

employment of Local Lay-Pastors and establish the content of a licence for Local Lay-Pastors.

- 26/10.** The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to establish a training pathway and appropriate training resources for Local Lay-Pastors.
- 26/11.** The Conference directs that from 1 September 2022 completion of the core training will be an essential requirement for any new appointment of a licensed Local Lay-Pastor.
- 26/12.** The Conference directs that from 1 September 2025 all Local Lay Pastors will have completed the core training and be appropriately licensed.
- 26/13.** The Conference adopts the understanding of itinerancy in paragraph 5.1.9 and directs the Ministries Committee to ensure that it is brought to the attention of all potential candidates for ministry, student ministers, and probationers, and that it is drawn to the attention of ministers as part of the invitation and re-invitation processes.
- 26/14.** The Conference directs that Standing Order 543(1) is amended as follows: Subject to Standing Order 547(2) the initial invitation to a presbyter shall *normally* be for a period of five years, no annual invitation being necessary during that period.
- 26/15.** The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to review the aspects of the stationing matching process described in paragraph 5.2.5 and report to the 2022 Conference.
- 26/16.** The Conference directs the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to review Standing Order 780 and report to the 2022 Conference.
- 26/17.** The Conference directs the Stationing and Ministries Committees to ensure that within the candidating, training and stationing processes:
- a. there is a clear process for enabling some presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural/language appointments;
 - b. that this possibility is clearly communicated to those involved in the candidating, training and stationing matching processes; and
 - c. there is guidance for Circuits and presbyters considering such appointments;
- and report to the 2022 Conference.