

## 29. Review of Criteria for Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper

<b>Contact name and details</b>	The Revd Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
<b>Resolutions</b>	<p>29/1. The Conference receives the Report.</p> <p>29/2. The Conference amends Standing Order 011 as set out in paragraph 4.1.</p> <p>29/3. The Conference adopts the proposed criteria for granting Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper set out in paragraph 4.2 and directs that they be printed in Book VI Part 3 of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, in place of the existing criteria.</p> <p>29/4. The Conference directs that, in any individual case, any period of authorisation prior to 1 September 2023 shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining the six-year period in Standing Order 011(5).</p> <p>29/5. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Authorisations Committee to keep the new criteria under review and to bring any further recommendations necessary to a future Conference.</p> <p>29/6. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to explore whether the practice of Extended Communion in the Methodist Church might be widened and to report to the Conference with appropriate recommendations.</p>

### Summary of content and impact

<b>Subject and aims</b>	To review the criteria for the granting of authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper to persons other than presbyters
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are several issues with the current criteria.</li> <li>• New criteria are proposed which seek to address these issues and be more suitable for our current context.</li> </ul>

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<b>Background context and relevant documents (with function)</b>	The existing criteria are in CPD, Book VI, Part 3.
<b>Consultations</b>	Authorisations Committee. Evangelism and Growth Team.
<b>Impact</b>	Authorisations Committee, District Policy Committees and Circuits applying will need to learn a new process and criteria.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Conference of 2020 directed the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Authorisations Committee, to review the criteria for authorisations to preside at the Lord’s Supper (hereinafter ‘authorisations’) and to bring recommendations for revised criteria to the 2021 Conference. The challenges of the ongoing Covid pandemic and the pressure of other work has meant that unfortunately it has not been possible to bring this work until now.

### 2. Principles

- 2.1 The Methodist Church affirms that Holy Communion is the central act of Christian worship,<sup>1</sup> an essential element in the life of any Methodist church. In the Methodist Church presidency at Holy Communion is normally exercised by presbyters, and any lay presidency requires specific authorisation by the Conference; this position is rooted in the Deed of Union which says: ‘For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the presbyters of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.’<sup>2</sup> The provision of an authorisation to preside is to support and enable the mission and worship of local Methodist churches and Circuits.
- 2.2 There are several issues with the current situation:
- The existing criteria have two categories of deprivation – the original 1997 criteria (hereinafter ‘ordinary’) and the missional criteria. In the ordinary criteria, pastoral relationship with a congregation or congregation(s) in question is not considered in any way to strengthen the application and if the

1 Methodist Worship Book (p. 114).

2 CPD 2022 p. 213

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Committee considers that an authorisation may blur distinctions between ministries, it may decline the application. In the missional criteria, the person 'should be able to identify with the situation, preferably as a pioneer minister or some other community leader.'<sup>3</sup>

- The ordinary criteria are based on a mathematical formula which embodies assumptions that are no longer valid. These include that presbyters take no Sundays off in the quarter and that churches have two services a Sunday. It also assumes that it is the celebration of Holy Communion on a Sunday where deprivation is likely to occur. This may still be the case, but it can be questioned as to whether this assumption should be so strongly built into the criteria.
- The use of a mathematical formula means Circuits may engage simply with the numbers rather than considering the theological issues at play.
- The current criteria give little guidance as to the discernment of who the appropriate person(s) to whom an authorisation should be granted might be. There is more provision about those to whom authorisations should not be granted (deacons, lay employees, local lay pastors etc).

2.3 The Committee believes that the language of deprivation is not the only possible language for this situation and not always the most appropriate. It provides a negative approach to the question and in reality few of our members are actually *deprived* of Holy Communion: rather the question is how readily it should be available and what provision best serves our mission. However, in terms of ecumenical relations, there are benefits to using the language of deprivation in signalling why the Methodist Church makes exceptions to the traditional practice that presidency at Holy Communion is exercised by presbyters. *Called to Love and Praise* notes that such exceptions are through 'pastoral deprivation or missionary emergency'<sup>4</sup>. While retaining an underlying principle that the granting of an authorisation arises out of deprivation, the Committee proposes that the authorisation process should explore more qualitatively how granting an authorisation to preside at Holy Communion is related to the needs of the context in mission, worship and discipleship.

2.4 As a starting point in terms of the celebration of Holy Communion, the Faith and Order Committee takes the view that any *local church* should be resourced to celebrate Holy Communion at least once a month at its *principal* act of worship. In applying for an authorisation, the circuit should explain how the need for the celebration of Holy Communion in a Circuit cannot be resourced

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3 CPD 2022 p. 794

4 *Called to Love and Praise*, Methodist Conference 1999, §4.5.8

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from the presbyters available. For example, this may be due to lack of numbers, or that the particular needs of a specialised missional context (eg *New Places for New People* or those using languages other than English) cannot be met by the existing circuit staff. The Circuit should also explain its mission strategy taking into account *Our Calling* and how the need for an authorisation arises missionally, pastorally, or in terms of deepening discipleship. Alongside this, it is important both within the Methodist Church and in the context of our ecumenical relationships to emphasise that this is a practice we adopt in response to deprivation that occurs in particular situations and in furtherance of our work and mission as a church.

### 3. Whom to authorise?

- 3.1 Circuits need to exercise discernment about whom to authorise to preside. This is a significant and spiritual task and those authorised should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the significance of Holy Communion in the life of the Church and in the communities where they will preside. The Committee suggests that in many cases suitable candidates will be drawn from the Circuit's local preachers. This is appropriate in that the celebration of Holy Communion should always include the ministry of the word. In some contexts, worship leaders will be appropriate candidates. If the potential recipient of an authorisation is not a local preacher, they would need an accredited preacher working with them.
- 3.2 As observed, one of the challenges of the current situation is the tension between the missional and the ordinary criteria with regard to pastoral identification with the relevant contexts. Clearly it is desirable that persons authorised have the relevant gifts to minister in the context required. However, it should also be remembered that the celebration of Holy Communion is always an act of the whole Church and not simply a local concern. We therefore recommend that any local role a person may hold should not be considered a relevant factor in discerning whether they are the most suitable person to receive an authorisation. What will be relevant is the gifts they show for the contexts in which the ministry is needed. Furthermore, it will continue to be necessary to take care that granting of authorisations does not create confusion as to the Methodist Church's understanding of ministry and particular ministerial roles. In such cases, the Authorisations Committee may decline to recommend an authorisation be granted even if the other criteria are satisfied.
- 3.3 A question has been raised as to whether probationer presbyters should be eligible for authorisations to preside in the new pattern of probation being developed following the changes to the candidating process made by the Conference of 2022. This was referred to the Faith and Order Committee by the

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Ministries Committee, while work on this report was in progress. The Committee recognises that some probationers in the new pattern will be stationed with extensive experience of leading worship and preaching, while for others probation will be a critical period of formation in these skills. It therefore takes the view that it would not be appropriate to impose a blanket ruling on whether presbyteral probationers can be granted authorisation to preside. Instead, it encourages those responsible for each probationer's formation (in circuit and connexionally) to consider what is most appropriate in their situation and to recognise that in some situations it would be appropriate not to apply for authorisation.

- 3.4 There are some other persons for whom it is not appropriate to apply for an authorisation. An authorisation will not normally be granted to those whose offer as candidates for presbyteral ministry has been declined. There may, however, be circumstances when this is appropriate, but such an application would not be granted within five years of the declined offer. In such cases the vocational issues should first be thoroughly explored by the superintendent with the person concerned before the application goes to a circuit meeting.
- 3.5 The office of local lay-pastor does not bring with it authorisation to preside at Holy Communion (SO 56A0(3)). *Changing Patterns of Ministry* affirms that '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.'<sup>5</sup> The Committee takes the view that such occasions will be extremely rare due to the potential for confusion of roles granting an authorisation to a local lay-pastor will create. Circuits making such applications will need to be very clear as to why someone who is also a local lay-pastor is nevertheless discerned to be the most appropriate person to be authorised.
- 3.6 The Conference of 2019 affirmed by resolution 25/9 that it is not appropriate for deacons to receive authorisations. Standing Order amendments to give effect to this affirmation are included below, following consultation with the Law and Polity Committee.
- 3.7 Careful consideration should be given to ecumenical sensitivities when Circuits are considering applying for authorisations. With some ecumenical partners, Methodists presiding by virtue of an authorisation may not pose a challenge, while for others this may raise questions. In the case of probationers for

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5 Changing Patterns of Ministry, Methodist Conference 2021, §4.4.9

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presbyteral ministry who will have pastoral responsibility for Local Ecumenical Partnerships this issue should be considered particularly carefully.

- 3.8 As at present, we propose that the maximum length an authorisation may be applied for is three years. However, we suggest any given person should have an authorisation no more than six years at a time and therefore we propose that only one further period of three years should be permitted. This does not prevent the Circuit making an application for another person to be authorised but seeks to preserve clarity as to our understanding of different roles and ministries. Where someone feels called to a longer term ministry of this kind, attention is drawn to the relevant discernment pathways, including those for local or specific contexts. The Committee is aware further work is being done on pathways related to ordained ministry in pioneer contexts. By way of transitional arrangements, the Committee proposes that any periods of authorisation before 1 September 2023 should not count towards the six-year maximum. In this way, no one will hit the limit before 2029 giving suitable opportunity to consider appropriate ways forward.

### 4. Proposal

- 4.1 The considerations outlined above will require amendments to Standing Order 011 and the following revised form is proposed. The opportunity has also been taken to clarify the title of this Standing Order.

**011 Conduct of Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper.** (1) A Circuit which considers that ~~it is any of its churches or a significant number of church members or other Christians in the local community is deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper~~ **because it cannot meet a sustained need for the celebration of that sacrament** through lack of ~~with the~~ **presbyters available** may apply for the authorisation of persons other than presbyters to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent.

(2) (a) Subject to clauses (4) and (5)(a) below all such applications, with reasons for making them and the consent of the nominee, shall be submitted by the Circuit Meeting for consideration by the district Policy Committee. The Superintendent of any Circuit making an application may attend the committee while that application is under consideration.

(b) Persons nominated for authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper shall be members in the Circuit, ~~or deacons~~ or **presbyteral** probationers appointed or expected to be appointed to it. The district Policy Committee shall be provided

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with information as to the suitability of all persons so nominated, and shall make its recommendations to the Synod. Such information shall be provided by the Circuit Meeting in the case of members in the Circuit; **and** by the appropriate Oversight Committee in the case of presbyteral probationers; ~~and by the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order in the case of deacons and diaconal probationers.~~

(3) All such applications shall be sent, with the recommendations of the district Policy Committee and the comments of the Synod thereon, to the convener of an Authorisations Committee appointed for the purpose by the Methodist Council, and the Authorisations Committee shall report with its recommendations directly to the Conference, which shall grant such authorisations as it thinks fit, to take effect from the beginning of the next connexional year. Appeals against the committee's recommendations shall be heard by a further committee appointed for the purpose from among the members of the next Conference by the Methodist Council. The report of the appeals committee shall be presented together with the general report of the Authorisations Committee.

(4) If an additional appointment of a ~~deacon or~~ **presbyteral** probationer to a Circuit is proposed, or if circumstances arise which require a member in a Circuit to be nominated, at a date when it is no longer practicable to complete the procedure prescribed by clause (2) above an application may be made by the Circuit Meeting (or if it cannot be called in time by the Superintendent and circuit stewards) directly to the Authorisations Committee. The criterion in clause (1) above and the requirements of clause (2)(a) above as to the provision of reasons and consent shall apply and information as to the nominee shall be provided to the committee by the appropriate person under clause (2)(b) above.

(5) (a) The authorisation shall be renewable annually. If the district Policy Committee is satisfied that the person authorised remains suitable and the circumstances of the Circuit have not changed, it may on the application of the Circuit Meeting recommend a renewal of the authorisation for a second or third year, and the Authorisations Committee shall support any such recommendation without further investigation. If renewal is sought beyond the initial ~~or any subsequent~~ period of three years the procedures set out in clauses (2) and (3) above shall be followed in full. **No person may hold an authorisation for a continuous period in excess of six years.**

(b) Once granted, an authorisation shall cease to be exercisable by the person authorised on cessation of membership or of the status of ~~deacon or~~ **presbyteral** probationer, as the case may be, or on removal from the Circuit.

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(6) Persons so authorised shall, unless already instructed in presidency at the Lord's Supper, be so instructed by the Chair or by a presbyter appointed by him or her, the forms of service authorised by the Conference being used as a basis of instruction.

(7) In emergencies arising after the meeting of the Conference by the death of a presbyter or otherwise, the President or the Vice-President on his or her behalf may grant an authorisation having immediate effect and continuing until the 31st August following the next meeting of the Conference.

### 4.2 *The Criteria*

The Faith and Order Committee proposes that the key criteria for applying for an authorisation to preside at Holy Communion should be:

1. The sustained need for the celebration of Holy Communion which cannot be resourced from the presbyters available in a Circuit.
2. A mission strategy that supports the need for an authorisation.
3. A suitable person nominated by the Circuit who can be trusted to hold an appreciation of the significance of Holy Communion in the life of the church

All three criteria must be met. The criteria in CPD (pp794-5) would be replaced as follows:

1. Sustained need for the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which cannot be met from the presbyters available, leading to deprivation from that sacrament, is the ground on which a person other than a presbyter may be authorised to preside at that sacrament. The regulations governing the applications for and the granting of such authorisations are contained in Standing Order 011, and these criteria should be read in conjunction with and subject to the provisions of that Standing Order.

2. To be granted an authorisation a Circuit must demonstrate on application to the Authorisations Committee:

1. The sustained need for the celebration of Holy Communion which cannot be resourced from the presbyters available in a circuit.
2. A mission strategy that supports the need for an authorisation.
3. A suitable person nominated by the Circuit who can be trusted to hold an appreciation of the significance of Holy Communion in the life of the church

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There may be different reasons why the sustained need cannot be met from the presbyters available which may include, for example, lack of numbers or the particular needs of specialised mission contexts.

3. Authorisations are granted for someone to assist across a Circuit and should be exercised at the direction of the Superintendent. Appropriate consideration should be given to ensure that the exercise of the authorisation responds to the particular needs for which it was sought and helps to meet them. Authorisations are not related to any particular local role (eg lay employee or local lay-pastor) a person may have and the holding of any such role is not a relevant factor in determining suitability to be granted an authorisation. In circumstances where the committee judges that such an arrangement might lead to a blurring of the distinctions between particular callings and ministries, the Authorisations Committee may decline to recommend an authorisation for a given named individual even when the other criteria are met. An authorisation will not normally be granted to those whose offer as candidates for presbyteral ministry has been declined. Where this is nevertheless deemed appropriate, such an application would not be granted within five years of the declined offer. In such cases, the vocational issues should first be thoroughly explored by the superintendent with the person concerned before the application goes to a circuit meeting.

4. To assess the suitability of the person proposed, evidence shall be presented to the district Policy Committee of his or her

- (a) general competence, gifts and graces in leading worship with respect to the contexts in question, and
- (b) understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The written consent of the person proposed is also required.

5. Authorisations may be granted to presbyteral probationers and other lay persons. Persons authorised must be members in the relevant Circuit or presbyteral probationers appointed to it.

### 4.3 *Further Work*

Methodist discipline currently provides for extended communion in homes, hospitals and hospices, where elements set aside at a previous celebration of Holy Communion can be shared with those unable to attend. We suggest that a further piece of work is done to explore whether extended communion could be

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more widely used as a suitable way of enabling sacramental coverage without the need for as many authorisations. This would involve exploring whether bread and wine set aside at a celebration of Holy Communion in one church could then be used in a service for another congregation led by a suitably designated and authorised person. Currently this practice is not permitted.

### 4.4 *Implementation*

The Committee has considered whether it would be appropriate to pilot the new criteria or to adopt them temporarily, recognising that they involve substantial changes to the practice up to now and there will be significant implications both for circuits applying and for the Authorisations Committee. However, it felt that having different systems operating in parallel would generate more work rather than less as well as raising questions of parity between circuits within and without any pilot area. It also considered an initial temporary period of adoption with the possibility of review later. However, in the event, it considers that the best way forward is to propose these new criteria for adoption by the Conference and to keep progress under review as the new process is embedded. If need be, the Committee will ask the Conference to make amendments to address any issues that are identified.

## 5. **Appendix: Proposed new application format**

### *Preliminary considerations*

Circuit name and number

District name and number

1. Please describe the context of the Circuit.
2. Please describe the current practice of the Circuit in celebrating Holy Communion
  - a. The number of Holy Communion services taking place currently (each quarter) at the main act of worship at each relevant location.
  - b. Other celebrations of Holy Communion taking place regularly in the life of the circuit.
3. Please describe:
  - a. the aspirations of the Circuit in terms of celebrating Holy Communion
    - i. The number of Holy Communion Services the circuit discerns to be necessary so that every congregation has at least a monthly celebration of Holy Communion at its main service. (quarterly)

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- ii. The number of further celebrations of Holy Communion the Circuit discerns to be necessary.
  - iii. An account of the practicalities that impact provision for example time and distance
- b. The reasons it is not possible to accommodate these needs with the circuit's current availability of presbyteral ministry.

### *The application*

- 1 Meets the criteria.
- 2 Does not yet meet the criteria (*the application shows potential – further conversation with DPC/Authorisations Committee may be helpful*)
- 3 Does not meet the criteria.

1. Please describe the need for the celebration of Holy Communion that cannot be provided by the presbyters of the Circuit

*How does Holy Communion fit into the life of the Circuit?  
How will this authorisation reflect Our Calling and Priorities?*

2. How will this authorisation relate to the Circuit's mission plan?
- a. *Missionally*
  - b. *Pastorally*
  - c. *Deepening discipleship*

*In what ways is the application aided or enlightened by Methodist strategies – God for All, Methodist Way of Life, JDS etc – and how an authorisation may further these?*

3. Have other ways of meeting the need for the celebration of Holy Communion been considered?

*What other opportunities for celebrating Holy Communion across congregations or ecumenically have been explored which would mitigate the need for lay authorisations?*

- a. *Ecumenically*
- b. *Mid-week etc*

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4. Are there any ecumenical considerations in connection with this application? What steps have been or will be taken to ensure that the position(s) of ecumenical partners are respected?

*Which ecumenical partners might be involved? What approach do they take to presidency at the Lord's Supper? Has any appropriate consultation been undertaken as part of preparing this application?*

5. For whom is the authorisation sought?

*Has the Circuit considered safer recruiting, and JDS issues in making a nomination? What are the circuit plans for induction, accountability and review including supervision and training?*

*Has the person previously candidated for presbyteral ministry?*

*Please provide a reasoned statement for the named person*

6. Any other relevant information that will help the Authorisations Committee.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 29/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 29/2. The Conference amends Standing Order 011 as set out in paragraph 4.1 above.**
- 29/3. The Conference adopts the proposed criteria for granting Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper set out in paragraph 4.2 above and directs that they be printed in Book VI Part 3 of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, in place of the existing criteria.**
- 29/4. The Conference directs that, in any individual case, any period of authorisation prior to 1 September 2023 shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining the six-year period in Standing Order 011(5).**
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