

## 11. Methodist Forces Board

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1. This year British forces have continued to be deployed to several areas of risk, as well as for training purposes, and at times this includes the deployment of forces chaplains. The military continues to assist civilian authorities (Military Aid to Civilian Authorities, MACA) with the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides additional opportunities and challenges for chaplains who offer spiritual and pastoral care to military personnel involved in this assistance and those impacted by the various lockdowns. All three services continue to recruit ordained ministers to serve as chaplains to the Armed Forces.
2. The Methodist Church in Britain has a total of 29 full-time chaplains: six Royal Navy, 13 Army, nine Royal Air Force and one full-time Army Reserve. Since the last Conference, Thomas Goodwin has left the Royal Navy and Clive Larrett will retire as Military Support Function Chaplain in September. One presbyter has been recommended to go forward for training with the Army during 2021. Methodist pastoral supervision has been implemented for all Methodist forces chaplains and pastoral workers and a further eight chaplains are currently in the process of being trained with a view to becoming supervisors of Methodist forces chaplains during 2021/22.
3. One of the consequences of the pandemic has been that the annual visit of the President of the Conference was unable to take place as planned. However, the President was present for the duration of the annual Methodist tri-service Forces Chaplains' Conference and led encouraging and stimulating sessions. This year the conference was held online and the newly acquired skills of the Methodist Forces Board (MFB) Administrator and Projects Officer meant that chaplains within and beyond the UK were able to engage in formal and informal conversations. The Revd George Perera led a session on 'The Christian Message in a Secular Age'. The Revd Dr Roger Walton led us in two sessions on 'A Methodist Way of Life'. We were pleased to hear from the Revd Ruth Gee, in her final year as Assistant Secretary of the Conference, on current issues facing the Methodist Church. The Revd Andrew de Ville (the Chair of District with responsibility for chaplains as they leave the Forces) was present throughout the conference and led us in a helpful conversation on *God in Love Unites Us*.

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4. The Board was pleased to be able to offer the booklet, *Methodist ministers serving as Chaplains to the Armed Forces* to share stories of Methodist ministers who represent the Methodist Church in this dynamic, challenging, and rewarding context. It is anticipated that a similar publication will be available during the next connexional year regarding opportunities for ordained and lay members of the Methodist Church to explore opportunities through cadet force chaplaincies.
5. The Board is extremely grateful to the Ministries Team and the East Solent and Downs Circuit (Southampton District) for their support in working towards the provision of a dedicated route whereby service personnel may discern a call to preach and undertake the Worship: Leading and Preaching training.
6. Following consultation with the Methodist Council the Board has now confirmed a revised strategy for the future. With the drawdown of the reserves to a level that leaves the Board with the finance to resource the core activity for the next 10-15 years, the Forces Board has therefore decided to implement a planned, phased transition out of Projects Work during 2020-21 with an expected termination date for all the roles of 30 June 2021. The Board has agreed at present to maintain the posts of the Secretary of the Forces Board as full time, the MFB administrator as part-time and that of the Projects Officer to scope, test and embed the new focus of the MFB.
7. The work of the MFB during 2021 and into the future will comprise:
  - The activities listed under SO 1007 and a full programme of pastoral supervision, pastoral visits, and an annual Tri-Service Conference;
  - Delivery of major projects and small grants in support of armed forces chaplains;
  - Engagement with local Methodist churches to resource and support increased delivery on the Armed Forces Covenant;
  - Initiatives to support Methodist colleagues offering their services as officiating or Cadet Force chaplains;
  - Increased awareness and engagement with and support for families of Methodist serving personnel - predominantly through local Methodist churches.
8. The Forces Board continues to be extremely thankful to the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) for its excellent financial support. It is this provision that has enabled the Board to fund a range of projects over a long period of time as well as during 2020/21 including: a children and youth work project within the Aldershot garrison town; a part-time pastoral worker to support the chaplaincy at the tri-service Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood; a full-time

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community pastoral officer at RAF Benson; a project for a families worker at RNAS Culdrose; a lay families' worker at RAF Marham; a part-time lay families' worker at Hamworthy Barracks; a full-time lay families worker at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham. Since the AMMT's disposal of its income-generating asset, the AMMT is moving towards developing a policy relating to its grant giving, but has previously indicated a reduction on available monies or duration of support for this work without this source of income. Consequently, following the Methodist Council's approval of the MFB Strategic Vision 2020-2025, these posts will no longer be funded by the MFB. Resolution 10/2 of the 2020 Conference has led to some initial conversation to explore the possibility of a unified body to act on behalf of the Methodist Church with respect to its engagement with the Armed Forces. It is hoped that a proposal will be brought to the Conference in 2022.

9. The Projects Officer has been instrumental in providing support to MFB employees during the COVID restrictions of the past year. Understandably the pandemic has prevented travel to various military establishments this year. However, a number of concepts are in various stages of progression as part of the work of the MFB listed above.
10. The Board also offers a range of small grants to chaplains for activities within their communities.
11. The Forces Board continues to express to the Conference its thanks for the prayerful support given to all our chaplains and encourages anyone who would like to know more about Forces Chaplaincy to speak to members of the Board.
12. The Board pays tribute to the work of the MFB project workers over the decades and for the lives they have touched in so many positive ways.
13. The Board is extremely grateful to Mr Peter Green for his commitment to the Forces Board for over twenty years and wishes him every blessing for the future.
14. The Board is grateful for the ongoing diligence and commitment of its Secretary to the ministries of the chaplains and the Board.
15. Members of the Methodist Forces Board for 2021/2022 will be: the Revds John Alderdice, David Barrett, Andrew P De Ville, William D Gates, Dr Chrissie Howe (convener), Paul Mellor, Timothy Wilkinson, Dr Andrew D Wood, Cdr Mark Barton, Lt Cdr (ret) Shirley Hewitt, Ms Jude Levermore, Mrs Liesel Parkinson, Mr Mark Powell, Mr Doug Swanney (Chair), Mrs Sue Walters.

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

- 11/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 11/2. The Conference directs the Methodist Forces Board and Aldershot Methodist Military Trust to continue their conversations and bring a proposal for a unified body for Methodist engagement with the Armed Forces to the 2022 Conference.**